

Critique

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WILLIAM STYRON

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BELLOW'S DANGLING MEN

J. C. LEVENSON

Dangle . . . 3. in *grammar*, to lack clear connection with the proper substantive. . . . *New World Dictionary*.

American literature is full of dangling men whose loose connection with actual, rooted institutions is what first lets them move into a story and whose easy uncommitted relation to specific ideals keeps the plot going. Often the social context of their fictive action is so vaguely represented that it can be said hardly to exist. The true dangler wants to read all the terms of the covenant, study the clauses in fine print, before he signs the social compact. (If he ever does sign—for sometimes the free hero declines, questioning not merely whether he will join society, but even whether he will join the universe.) Although no one perfectly realizes the type, Natty Bumppo and Daniel Boone, Hester Prynne and Ahab, Daisy Miller and Huckleberry Finn march in the same direction even if they do not always keep step; at a later hour, Jake Barnes joins the irregular parade and laconically talks of wounds with raging Ahab, Jay Gatsby in engaging Oxford tones puts a question or two to the Jamesian contingent, Ike McCaslin humbly takes his place with the foraging party. They are free spirits all, and yet they seem to gravitate to the same open road. The classic American pattern of individualism and uniformity is as evident in literature as in society. The writer's problem is whether there may not be some new way to be free, whether there must not be—when the fish and game have all but disappeared, and illusions are hard to come by, and society itself has sustained wounds from which it may never recover—a new turn for the imagination to take. After Buchenwald and Hiroshima, fiction can hardly remain the same, and in the most interesting of our postwar novelists, it has indeed changed. For while the persistent character of Saul Bellow's novels is the dangling man,

the old American hero has been reborn in a new time and a new situation; he dangles differently.

One aspect of the difference may be suggested by the notion that Bellow's America has joined the world while his characters are still trying to decide whether or not they will join America. The American side of his subject is indisputable: Richard Chase has quite rightly declared that Whitman and Mark Twain stand benevolently looking over Bellow's shoulder as he writes; their energy, exuberance, and wonder are continued in him, and so is their determination to extricate their freedom whenever they may be caught "on the verge of a usual mistake." But Nietzsche and Dostoevski are equally the familiars of Bellow's imaginative world: the international theater of his imagination consists primarily in that. The new combinations which can be made out of the infinite possibilities of art are what give delight even in Bellow's earliest novel of 1944, *Dangling Man*—the story of a young man waiting indefinitely for the draft call; his number having come up, there is no chance of finding a job, only endless waiting and the indefiniteness of life without purpose. Joseph began with the Whitman endowment of equanimity, in which "judgment is second to wonder, to speculation on men, drugged or clear, jealous, ambitious, good, tempted, curious, each in his own time and with his customs and motives, and bearing the imprint of strangeness in the world." And he had the old hopefulness which looked toward "a 'colony of the spirit,' or a group whose covenants forbade spite, bloodiness, and cruelty. To hack, to tear, to murder was for those in whom the sense of the temporariness of life had shrunk. The world was crude and it was dangerous and, if no measures were taken, existence could indeed become . . . 'nasty, brutish, short'." But when war and the machinery of the state have thrown a barrier across his open road, he falters. American attitudes, however warmly and deeply held, cannot exempt a man from the European, the human condition of limited choice. His sanguine detachment becomes aloneness, isolation from others and even from his own true self. To hope for a colony of the spirit has been to hope too much for the way he can shape his life, and when the hope fails, he gradually becomes disengaged from all connections of love and all capacity for purpose. The blank wall in his path is as absolute as two plus two makes four, and for him there is neither the noble transcendence of Isabel Archer's accom-

modation to destiny nor Huck Finn's simple (and spurious) detour to the territory ahead. Confronted by the wall, he goes underground.

But Bellow's Joseph is not altogether Dostoevski's man, for he dangles in the "crater of the spirit," he does not drown. His vitality wanes until in his boredom with the world and himself he gets to be the man who picks fights, who looks for danger, who is "tired of having to identify a day as 'the day I asked for a second cup of coffee,' or 'the day the waitress refused to take back the burned toast,' and so want[s] to blaze it more sharply, regardless of the consequences. Perhaps, eager for the consequences." To this point, the pattern of ennui in Bellow's novels runs parallel to that of *Notes from the Underground*, in which "luxurious inertia" and the "voluptuous pleasure" of morbid self-exploration provide our clue to the leading character. But the answer to Robert Frost's sardonic question, "How are we to write The Russian novel in America/As long as life goes so unutterably?", has not been simply to rewrite Dostoevski in a new place. The theme of Bellow's fiction is the reverse of his model's, for the drama enacted *through* his characters makes it clear that if we do not find ourselves, we are likely to lose ourselves. The sick soul is the same anywhere, but what the Bellow hero seeks is recovery, not rebirth. Joseph's friend, who can look into the dark with the eyes of a cat and yet not collapse at the sight of the truth, is the ideal: ". . . In spite of the calamity, the lies and moral buggery, the odium, the detritus of wrong and sorrow dropped on every heart, in spite of these, he can keep a measure of cleanliness and freedom." The friend survives, however, because he faces the outward more than the inner dark. Bellow puts little emphasis on the point simply because his hero has to learn this for himself, but the point exists to suggest an interpretation of Joseph's agonized cry about the way "we throw ourselves away"—"When what we really want is to stop living so exclusively and vainly for our own sake, impure and unknowing, turning inward and self-fastened." Joseph finally breaks out of his "six-sided box" by asking his draft board for an immediate call.

One of the reviewers of *Dangling Man* expressed a low opinion of the ending in which Joseph concludes his notes with his last sentiments as a civilian: "I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom canceled. Hurray for regular hours! And

for the supervision of the spirit! Long live regimentation!" But I doubt that the irony stops at the suggestion that mankind cannot long stand freedom, and I do not think that Bellow is simply translating the Underground Man's morbid "Hurray for the underground." The act of choice implies an affirmation of freedom as well as the loss of it. Why not believe Joseph when he claims to understand the virtue of preserving oneself—not one's skin, but one's humanity? The cheerful interpretation, to be sure, can be argued from nothing less than the whole context of the novel. But at the very beginning, Joseph's notes cite Goethe:

"All comfort in life is based upon a regular occurrence of external phenomena. The changes of the day and night, of the seasons, of flowers and fruits, and all other recurring pleasures that come to us, that we may and should enjoy them—these are the mainsprings of our earthly life. The more open we are to these enjoyments, the happier we are; but if these changing phenomena unfold themselves and we take no interest in them, if we are insensible to such fair solicitations, then comes on the sorest evil, the heaviest disease—we regard life as a loathsome burden. It is said of an Englishman that he hanged himself that he might no longer have to dress and undress himself every day."
(18)¹

The Englishman who hanged himself from ennui is immediately coupled in Joseph's mind with Shakespeare's Barnardine in *Measure for Measure* "whose contempt for life equaled his contempt for death, so that he would not come out of his cell to be executed." Despite Joseph's fixing upon Barnardine's insensitivity, the coupling in his mind is really right because of contrast rather than likeness: the drunken convict who with comic vitality will not consent to die is an alternative to the enfeebled slave of boredom. Such comicality belongs to the dangling man also, who, when he is not passively suffering, explodes by making scenes. The explosions are painful but also hilarious, for Joseph does what an inhibited reader might like to do and his outrageous conduct relieves our embarrassing impulses vicariously. But our pleasure in the assertion of vitality is never free of a lurking sense of danger until Joseph finally asserts himself constructively—not against society, but with it. And the irony with which his joining the army is treated strikes me as truly proper: as Barbara

Deming showed in her study of the movies in wartime, the popular pattern would have the hero, whom circumstance has made us doubt, turn out to have been a patriot all along; Joseph, aware that "certain blood will be given for half-certain reasons, as in all wars," obviously cannot rally the "irresponsibles" as well as Humphrey Bogart. Moral necessity demands a social act rather than a simple patriotic reflex, and if in conduct these two seem to come down to the same thing, in attitude there is a world of difference: Joseph laughs at himself.

Bellow's first novel prefigures the themes if not the amazing variety of his later work. Not that the later heroes all have to join the world by signing up with the United States Army; but time after time the inward and self-fastened man, the "apprentice in suffering" like Joseph, must learn if he can the Whitman lesson that agonies are one of our changes of garments. I think this is true even of his least inward, most Whitman-like character, Augie March, who describes himself as "democratic in temperament, available to everybody and assuming about others what I assumed about myself." *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) seems to invert the pattern, since Augie's impulse is to explore the outer world and his chief adventure is to look for greatness, but the inward measure is still the means by which he ultimately preserves the self. He who looks will find, of course; and Augie can find greatness in the unlikeliest of spots, in a minor real-estate operator, a crippled apartment-house owner in one of the drabber parts of Chicago:

William Einhorn was the first superior person I knew. He had a brain and many enterprises, real directing power, philosophical capacity, and if I were methodical enough to take thought before an important and practical decision and also (N. B.) if I were really his disciple and not what I am, I'd ask myself, "What would Caesar suffer in this case? What would Machiavelli advise or Ulysses do? What would Einhorn think?" (60)

In the ironic contrasts we also have a magnification of Einhorn himself, even when his young lieutenant Augie must carry him on his shoulders into a brothel: "He used to talk about himself as the Old Man of the Sea riding Sinbad. But there was Aeneas too, who carried his old dad Anchises in the burning of Troy, and *that*

old man had been picked by Venus to be her lover . . ." We catch our sight of greatness here because of the liveliness and reach of Bellow's (and Augie's) language, and we retain our safe distance of detachment because of Augie's (and Bellow's) remembering that he is *not* a disciple, but an admirer. When Augie loses his detachment, he illustrates the varieties of lostness in the modern city as well as Joseph ever did. There is always the trap of ideology, for one; as Augie puts it, "God knows, there are abandoned and hungry principles enough flowing free and looking for attachment." And if principles can swallow up a man, so can people—unless the man ask as Augie asks, "Why should I become like these people who do not even know what they are themselves?" Augie learns the lesson early and often. He is "available" to so many principles and people that he makes us think, not altogether admiringly, that Walt Whitman has turned into Moll Flanders. Two hundred pages later than he ought to, he understands the repeated lesson and comes to a resolve: "I will never force the hand of fate to create a better Augie March, nor change the time to an age of gold." The resolution, I grudgingly admit, needs perhaps most of the repetition of adventures, for the "moral," as I read it, goes beyond the acceptance of oneself: the resilience of the true self is a necessary means of survival.

Not that Bellow deals in survivors only. After *Augie March*, he turned from finders to losers and presented a story of utter lostness. In *Seize the Day* (1956) we have the bitter comedy of another kind of urban character. Tommy Wilhelm is completely a part of the modern, urban system and its artificialities; he lives off a dwindling fortune, has failed equally as movie actor and as salesman, frequents the lobbies of brokerage houses following the ups and downs of the commodities on which his last speculations ride. Estranged from father, wife, children, he has very little self left to hold in contempt, and yet even in his misery he is funny. With his face shoved hard against the blank wall of his existence, he prays: "Oh, God. . . . Let me out of my trouble. Let me out of my thoughts, and let me do something better with myself. For all the time I have wasted I am very sorry. Let me out of this clutch and into a different life. For I am all balled up. Have mercy."

Tommy Wilhelm dangles and finally drops, but his pathos is but one aspect of Bellow's picture of the modern city, even in

this novel: the brilliant language which Bellow found in *Augie March* and the wonderful comic muse whom he first openly invited in that work, are both still present. What makes *Seize the Day* so compelling is an extraordinary villain, the devil who beguiles Tommy Wilhelm, takes his last seven hundred dollars to invest in rye and lard just when rye and lard are about to go down, and at the end lets Wilhelm keep him company at lunch and of course pick up the check. Dr. Tamkin is a psychologist, salesman, poet, and general purveyor of all the false or questionable or merely specious cures for what ails Wilhelm. Charlatan and chameleon, he can, when Wilhelm waxes maudlin, invent a wife to be sad about himself:

"I was married to a lush," said Tamkin. ". . . But I loved her deeply. She was the most spiritual woman of my entire experience.

"Where is she now?"

"Drowned," said Tamkin. "At Provincetown, Cape Cod. It must have been a suicide. She was that way—suicidal. I tried everything in my power to cure her. Because," said Tamkin, "my real calling is to be a healer. I get wounded. I suffer from it. I would like to escape from the sicknesses of others, but I can't. I am only on loan to myself, so to speak. I belong to humanity."

Liar! Wilhelm inwardly called him. Nasty lies. He invented a woman and killed her off and then called himself a healer, and made himself so earnest he looked like a bad-natured sheep. He's a puffed up little bogus and humbug with smelly feet. A doctor! A doctor would wash himself. He believes he's making a terrific impression, and he practically invites you to take off your hat when he talks about himself; and he thinks he has an imagination, but he hasn't, neither is he smart.

Then what am I doing with him here, and why did I give him the seven hundred dollars? thought Wilhelm. (95-96)

The power of imagination from which humanity and humor stem has passed like Wilhelm's money to the enemy of life, so that nothing can any longer save the protagonist from spiritual bankruptcy. At the end he stumbles into a stranger's funeral and gives way to sobbing, the one passionate mourner, grieving for himself—sloppy, pathetic, and horrifying.

Wilhelm's yielding himself to the bands of death would be only grim if it were not for the crucial scene in the cafeteria when he passes judgment just as firmly as if he said with Conrad's Kurtz, "The horror! The horror!" The moment of self-recognition

gives moral perspective to the whole story, but the fact of perception is no more important than the manner: Wilhelm sees himself as ludicrous, not horrible. Even a split second of comic vision testifies to a vitality that elsewhere in the story we see as only waning. The question, What am I doing here?, is funny, but it is not a joke. It is the very question which Bellow rephrased twice, within a year after *Seize the Day*, in an essay called "Distractions of a Fiction Writer." When the novelist, faltering momentarily, faces the blank wall of his solitude, he may ask himself:

"The whole world is in motion, blazing. And what are you doing? You're doing nothing commensurate. Only sitting here alone, oddly faithful to things you learned as a boy. They taught you the Palmer method in school, so here you are still covering pages with words. You go on about men and women, families and marriages, divorces, crime and flight, murders, weddings, wars, rises and declines, simplicities and complexities, blessedness and agony, and it's all largely imaginary. Who asks you to write such things? What the devil are you doing here? What's all this about dead and non-existent people—Priams and Hecubas? Who is this Hecuba anyway and what are you to her?"

The doubter may wonder why he writes; the doubter's question is good enough for Hamlet or Job's tempters. And it is good enough for all civilized humanity, too, for the essay returns to it when the writer has taken off his comic mask:

Why were we born? What are we doing here? Where are we going? In its eternal naïveté the imagination keeps coming back to these things.

The comic turn which Bellow puts upon his crucial situations is no doubt partly an American response. He knows that writers everywhere have been concerned in our time with men in impossible fixés; he is thoroughly aware of the grave, not to say morbid, sense of the "absurd," that watchword of postwar European letters. Yet an American writer has reason to be less surprised than his European fellow at finding the traditional props of human values to have fallen. "When so much is left out," Henry James long ago observed of American culture, what pre-eminently remains to the writer is "his national gift, that 'American humor' of which of late years we have heard so much." And certainly

Bellow is not alone in seeing the absurdity of the absurd, the ridiculousness of the serious: two other writers who come to mind are Ralph Ellison and James Powers. The Negro, the Catholic, and the Jew have in the present generation joined the Southerner in discovering the advantage of being in a conscious minority; if the politicians and authors of textbooks had not been saying so for so long, one might speculate that this is one of the most viable ways to be an American. Writers are always in minorities of one, to be sure; but the life of the mind needs company too, and history and caste have created in America rich bi-cultural traditions for those who can possess them. Despite everyone's proper worry about the tyranny of the majority, no nation is richer than America in the saving variety at its disposal. Scholars can refine their classification of Southern, Negro, Jewish, Irish humor, but each tradition has its dual status in the federal system of our literature.

The case of Bellow is very much to the point. He can present Dostoevski's blank wall with humor partly because local tradition makes humor come easily; after all, it is the wall of Melville's *Bartleby*, too, and the alienated dangler is as American as Henry Adams. But Bellow's native grounds, while they are local, are not singly or narrowly so: my guess is that for every chuckle he has had from Mark Twain, he has had half a dozen at least from the Yiddish humorists whom Mark Twain admired. From the Russia which produced Dostoevski came this other literary tradition which expresses the humor rather than the despair and exaltation of the Insulted and Injured. Yet it is in America that the two strains have been combined. That America's curious freedom from the European past can work thus is not unusual: I take my notion from Louise Bogan's observation that Miss Marianne Moore combines in a peculiarly American way the Puritan and Baroque traditions, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. Surely the organic blending of Dostoevski and Yiddish humor is not less remarkable, nor less a subject for patriotic self-congratulation.

The interanimation of American and Jewish strains is a matter of gesture, language, and conception. Tommy Wilhelm's ludicrous self-pity at being all balled up puts him just a step away from the hero of *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), who sums up his personal history: "In my own way I worked very hard. Violent

suffering is labor, and often I was drunk before lunch." If not the character, then the author himself makes us see the comical aspect of agonies. And when Augie March indulges in his wintry speculations, he applies the dangling-man psychology to culture, whereby blank walls initiate new beginnings. "It was now full winter, and barbarous how raw," he says; and he goes on to reflect on the Chicago landscape: "There haven't been civilizations without cities. But what about cities without civilizations? An inhuman thing, if possible, to have so many people together who beget nothing on one another. No, but it is not possible, and the dreary begets its own fire, and so this never happens." The live imagination cannot finally yield to the belief in total disaster, and the supple language indicates its own live sources: for in setting the time—"It was now full winter, and barbarous how raw"—Bellow has linked a classically pure literary diction with a phrase that sounds like speech, an idiom which is Yiddish-American in a way that Hemingway's idiom is sometimes Spanish-American, a phrase heard nowhere perhaps but made for the ear. Bellow's voice and imagination are his own, but language is a social thing.

For Bellow's humanism, which takes us from the texture of his writing to underlying conceptions, there is ample precedent in American writers and in the European writers on whom Americans are educated. The idea that genuine freedom includes the acceptance of necessity and that life can only proceed by renewing itself seems the more valid in that it is not original. Yet the bi-cultural dimension, the looming presence of Jewish humor, is essential in Bellow's particular formulation. The best evidence of this is in Bellow's second novel, *The Victim* (1947). This most neatly composed of Bellow's works shows least his comic profusion or his humorous observation. The absurdity in the chain of victimizations seems not at all laughable, and the plot itself is the story of a dangler caught in the embrace of a drowner. The Victim thinks his downward spiral began because an anti-Semitic remark of his prompted the Jewish protagonist to revenge: when Leventhal made a scene with Allbee's boss, didn't he act with the malicious intent of getting Allbee fired? Suffering is contagious, and Leventhal is almost persuaded that if there is a victim, someone must be guilty—himself. Before chance and the unpredictable assertion of vitality untie the knot, Leventhal hears two versions of how suffering man may regard life. One is from Allbee:

"Now let me explain something to you. It's a Christian idea but I don't see why you shouldn't be able to understand it. 'Repent!' That's John the Baptist coming out of the desert. Change yourself, that's what he's saying, and be another man. . . . You have to get yourself so that you can't stand to keep on in the old way. . . . We're mulish; that's why we have to take such a beating. When we can't stand another lick without dying of it, then we change. And some people never do. They stand there until the last lick falls and die like animals. Others have the strength to change long before. But repent means now, this minute and forever, without wasting any more time." (227)

The other version he hears at a party which he forces himself to attend when his spirits are sunken:

"They tell a story about a little town in the old country. It was out of the way, in a valley, so the Jews were afraid the Messiah would come and miss them, and they built a high tower and hired one of the town beggars to sit in it all day long. A friend of his meets this beggar and he says, 'How do you like your job, Baruch?' So he says, 'It doesn't pay much, but I think it's steady work.'" (253-254)

In his own way, Bellow joins Emerson and Whitman in admonishing us not to change, but to live, and like his predecessors he does not intend us to live meanly. *Henderson the Rain King* gives one more proof of that. In the first place, Bellow's energetic, alienated, suffering, and remarkably unquiet hero enacts a fable against salvation by good works which puts Graham Greene's *Quiet American* in the shade. Exploring an Africa of the imagination in search of his own soul (does the idea come from Conrad—or from Thoreau?), the benevolent Henderson resolves to help the gentle cattle-people rid their water-supply of the taboo frogs which pollute it. Summoning to the cause of technical assistance all the inborn know-how he commands, he magnificently blasts the frogs out of existence and, incidentally, the dam and the water-supply as well. But Bellow's purpose goes beyond his demonstrating the superiority of American know-how in satirizing America. Henderson's main adventure is among the lion-people, among whom he learns both acceptance and aspiration. At home he had taken to pig-raising out of a gratuitous impulse to irritate a Jewish friend. Now with his porcine face and enormous body, he seems

to prove that those who live among pigs will become like pigs. It is the lion-king who says so, but I think it takes little daring to suggest that behind the narrative is the *persona* of an old Yiddish story-teller. When Henderson returns to America at the end or, rather, alights from the airplane at Gander, the first landfall of the New World, he has a foundling child in his arms and a lion cub on a leash at his heels.

Some of the comment on *Henderson the Rain King* has complained that the reader is not shown how Henderson makes a life for himself in the United States after he has thus recovered his humanity, and perhaps Bellow himself, a gentle, choleric, humorous, and somewhat dangling man, wishes he knew. But that is another novel. Meanwhile the new beginning, looking westward this time with a sense of possibility less than infinite, is a good ending: it shows that the American imagination has rediscovered an old way to be free.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

FOOTNOTE

1. All page references are to the first editions of the novels.

Life's Customer, Augie March

GERALD JAY GOLDBERG

With *The Adventures of Augie March* (1954), Saul Bellow gravitated in the romantic direction characteristic of our travel-stained, post-war generation, and essayed what was for him a new genre. As he himself has indicated, he eschewed the tradition of the "well-made" novel in order to write "catch-as-catch-can, picaresque."¹ Bellow, like Augie March, took his chances. *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, his first two books, are certainly more tidy than *Augie March*. But in each Bellow has written a lesser work than the latter: for the first is above all an idea which fails to be fleshed out through character; and the second is much too self-consciously contrived, as is James's *The Europeans*, with a starkness about it which has little relevance to thematic necessity, as, for example, the grimness of Malamud's *The Assistant* has. While *Augie March*, too, has its defects, the older tradition and looser form of the picaresque work for Bellow, enabling him to present his heavily autobiographical material. Rather than simply exposing a state of mind, here he has re-created an era, and the density of the fictional population is easily accommodated by the elastic form. Employing a vital language and a catalogue-clustered prose, Bellow is prodigal of extraneous detail, but this is a liberty which the freedom of the picaresque allows.

Although Bellow's form is right for his content, his content is not always right for his form. Probably the principal shortcoming noted by critics is the unsubstantiality of Augie as a fictional creation. Bellow himself must have sensed this lack, for at a point early in the novel he makes the proleptic announcement that inasmuch as Augie is largely a product of his environment he has stressed this aspect at the expense of describing his hero. Now this emphasis on milieu may be appropriate in a sociological study but is less so in a work of fiction; and particularly is this true with a form as sprawling as the picaresque, which requires, among other

things, a dynamic focal point to give it coherence. It seems to me that the limitations of *Augie* are directly related to a confusion in intent on the part of the author. Anthony West has called the book schizoid and I think he is right, but right for the wrong reasons. He describes *The Adventures of Augie March* as a good anecdotal novel but qualifies his praise by condemning Bellow for not being content with this and striving to write a symbolist work as well. What West gives with one hand he takes back with the other, and he seems to have as many arms as an octopus. It is not surprising that Bellow has recently seen fit to write a piece blasting those who find symbols when none are intended.² Unlike West, where I feel there is evidence of dual purpose and consequent disintegration is in the fact that Bellow seems to be torn between nostalgic re-creation of a world he has known and discriminatingly writing a cohesive novel. *Augie March* is unreal to the degree that he slips from being the subject of Bellow's work and becomes a time machine upon which the author can glide effortlessly back to his old haunts. Which is not to say that the emphasis on milieu is without thematic significance.

But Bellow's principal theme in *Augie March* is self-knowledge: man's attempt to determine "what we are." It is for this end that *Augie* is en route. Robert Penn Warren in his review of the novel—the most provocative written, by the way—comments on *Augie's* lack of commitment as the underlying cause of his shadowy projection; "it is hard," he says, "to give substance to a character who has no commitments." If it is, indeed, hard, it is far from impossible, as Faulkner proves with Benjy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. However, this issue is beside the point, for *Augie* does possess a sense of commitment. In fact, it is his dedication to an ideal which gives him the strength to say no to a host of people from the Renlings to Simon. *Augie's* commitment is to himself and to his special fate. When he refuses Mrs. Renling's offer of adoption, *Augie* admits: "the unvarnished truth is that it wasn't a fate good enough for me, because that was what came out clearly when it became a question of my joining up. As son." Throughout the novel, *Augie* is a seeker after what he terms alternately a "special fate," "distinctiveness," "America." The irony of this is that for him, and mankind in general, there is no fairy-tale ending. Bellow, in his first book, *Dangling Man*,

has spelled out the dangers of an untempered idealism. Joseph notes in his diary:

Of course, we suffer from bottomless avidity. Our lives are so precious to us, we are so watchful of waste. Or perhaps a better name for it would be the Sense of Personal Destiny. Yes, I think that is better than avidity. Shall my life by one-thousandth of an inch fall short of its ultimate possibility? It is a different thing to value oneself, and to prize oneself crazily. And then there are our plans, idealizations. These are dangerous, too. They can consume us like parasites, eat us, drink us, and leave us lifelessly prostrate. And yet we are always inviting the parasite, as if we were eager to be drained and eaten. (88)^a

When we last see Augie, he is plainly aware that reality has let him down: his plan for an academy-foster-home has had to be abandoned; his wife is more in love with her career than she is with him; and his work as European agent for Mintouchian he himself describes as "illicit dealing." Augie has profited from experience to the extent that he now recognizes the disparity between what he *thought* life held in store for him and what it actually did—profited to the extent that he has lived. What makes Bellow's hero at all sympathetic is that despite his unrealized dream, he has never adopted the cynicism of those around him. Though his fair ideal may be badly pock-marked, Augie is as sanguine at the end of the novel as he was at the beginning; and Bellow seems to be saying that even if there are no more "Americas," there is at least a way of life which makes discovery—self-discovery—possible.

If any single experience can be used as a measure of Augie's growth, it is his adventures south of the border. Ostensibly, this is the land where love is fulfilled and desires satisfied. That it should prove in reality a sordid *cul de sac* is Bellow's irony. It is to Mexico that the obese and rheumatic Eleanor Klein comes to seek a husband but finds instead sweatshop labor and disease; it is to Mexico that the love-fuddled Augie comes and discovers only squalor, infidelity, and decadence; and it is for Mexico that the grotesque Jacqueline yearns at the conclusion of the novel. Both for Eleanor and Augie, the Mexican experience results in physical and emotional damage and fails to fulfill their respective dreams. However, whereas Eleanor returns to Chicago to work at Zarro-

pick's, making "the suckers they sell in the stores next-door to schools," Augie remains the explorer. Significantly, when Jacqueline speaks to him of Mexico as "the dream of my life," he makes no effort to disillusion her. For Augie recognizes that it is no more ludicrous that Jacqueline should go to Mexico than that he should be on the fields of Normandy. Hope is Augie's spur, and his continued hope *in the face of experience* is either lamentable imbecility or something truly sublime in human nature. The sympathy Bellow evokes for Augie leaves no doubt that it is the latter.

Unlike most picaresque heroes, Augie is basically a passive figure. He is a drifter who falls into situations, and when they become untenable he either votes himself out or circumstances conspire to force his withdrawal. Typically, with the Renlings he rejects and with Thea he is rejected. Although Augie can act, rarely does he make a gesture which isn't a negative one. Lacking any clearly defined goals, he seeks his "special fate" by the process of elimination and ignores no possibility which presents itself, from chaperoning Trotsky at great personal hazard to being research assistant to Robey, the neurotic millionaire with a cultural ax to grind. Chance and the dominating influence of others are, for the most part, the twin forces in shaping Augie's future. Apparently Bellow's hero lacks the strength of character to give direction to his life; the key question then is whether Augie's accessibility to experience, which he sees as a virtue, must also be judged a weakness.

Though Augie in exposing himself to life and its molding forces is revealed as fundamentally a passive individual, Bellow clearly does not intend this passivity as a defect in his central protagonist's character. If Augie lets others create his environment ("All the influences were lined up waiting for me. I was born, and there they were to form me. . . ."), he is, according to Einhorn, not necessarily weak:

"All of a sudden I catch on to something about you. You've got *opposition* in you. You don't slide through everything. You just make it look so."

This was the first time that anyone had told me anything like the truth about myself. I felt it powerfully. That, as he said, I did have the opposition in me, and great desire to offer resistance

and to say "No!" which was as clear as could be, as definite a feeling as a pang of hunger. (117)

As I have suggested, Augie's search is ultimately for self-realization, and while his way may seem aimless and circumscribed by external influences, his quest demands courage of a truly high order. To justify this concept of Augie, I cite an exchange between Bernard and Edouard in Gide's *The Counterfeiters* which seems to me relevant:

"But at the present moment, what I should like to know is this—is it necessary to fix one's eyes on a goal in order to guide oneself in life?"

"Explain."

"I wrestled over it all last night. What am I to do with the strength I feel I possess? To what use am I to put it? How am I to get out of myself the best that's in me? Is it by aiming at a goal? But how choose such a goal? How know what it is before reaching it?"

"To live without a goal, is to give oneself up to chance."

"I am afraid you don't understand. When Columbus discovered America did he know towards what he was sailing? His goal was to go ahead, straight in front of him. Himself was his goal, impelling him to go ahead. . . ."

"I have often thought," interrupted Edouard, "that in art, and particularly in literature, the only people who count are those who launch out onto unknown seas. One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time."⁴

Not only does Bellow use the Columbus metaphor, but he also seems to agree with Gide that the questing life—Augie's way of life—though perilous, is potentially the most rewarding. Theodore Roethke's villanelle, "The Waking," with its refrain "I learn by going where I have to go," aptly describes Augie March. For Augie does learn.

I have called Augie a passive character and this, it seems to me, is fundamentally true, though the statement should be slightly modified. For there is some indication toward the conclusion of *The Adventures of Augie March* that Augie has sufficiently assimilated experience to play at last a more positive role in determining his future. The first paragraph of the novel states that "a man's character is his fate," and it is completely consistent that with the

bombing of Pearl Harbor Bellow's youthful enthusiast should get "carried away immediately." As he says, "Overnight I had no personal notions at all. . . . It was just the war I cared about and I was on fire." What is singular is that Augie joins up, enlists in the Merchant Marine, not because others desire it of him or that it is the path of least resistance, but rather in spite of their objections and even overcoming obstacles (e.g., his inguinal hernia, acquired while he was hunting iguanas) to achieve his goal. "You're absolutely nuts," Sophie Geratis says, "going under the knife while well and having an out from the draft," and brother Simon's attitude is essentially the same. Augie's marriage to Stella may be seen as another instance of his attempt to give direction to his life. Hence, if Augie has not wholly moved from passive to active, he has finally learned to take some halting steps in this direction. That these should turn out badly and the ends achieved be less than expected is certainly part of the meaning of the novel.

A "picaresque *schlimazl*" is Leslie Fiedler's description of Augie March.⁵ The anonymous author of the *Times Literary Supplement* article entitled "A Vocal Group: The Jewish Part in American Letters" in summarizing Fiedler's piece characterizes Augie as a "classic *schlemiel*."⁶ Now while these two Yiddish words are not polar extremes, neither are they synonyms. Nevertheless, it seems to me that both terms are applicable to Augie and revealing in their implications. A *schlimazl* is an individual who is the victim of bad luck, a fall guy to whom unattractive things happen. A *schlemiel*, on the other hand, is the person who can't do anything right, a "bumbler," a futile clown with a non-removable mask. A traditional exemplar for distinguishing the two is the restaurant scene in which the shabby customer attired in his last clean shirt is accidentally inundated by a plate of hot borsht which has slipped from the trembling hand of the inept waiter. For most of the novel Augie is life's customer, but even those few times when he becomes its trencher bearer the consequences are unfortunate. Though Augie's fortunes oscillate with the dramatic verve of a bouncing ball in a sing-along short, he is basically luckless. Nothing really works out for Augie. He is a *schlimazl*, a victim, in that the opportunity to sell newspapers at the LaSalle Street Station, which Simon arranges for him, he

forfeits by being repeatedly shortchanged; the Christmas thievery at Deever's Department Store, which Jimmy Klein encourages him in, is discovered and they are both found out; the sinecure which Mrs. Renling offers he refuses and he then falls upon hard times; the money-making scheme of illegally running immigrants into the United States from Canada, which Joe Gorman suggests to him, fails and, in the course of his escape, he is jailed; the assistance which Mimi Villars requests eventually leads to his rejection by the Magnuses; the job which Mimi arranges for him as a CIO union organizer results in his being beaten up; the expedition to hunt iguana lizards in Mexico, which Thea requires him to undertake with her, ends in his being critically injured when he is thrown from a horse. And when Augie takes his future in his own hands, he proves just as unlucky—a *schlemiel*. On his initial voyage as a merchant seaman aboard the *Sam MacManus*, the ship is torpedoed only fifteen days out of Boston; and though Augie does manage to save himself, among all the lifeboats and rafts strewn on the water he selects the one in which the only other occupant proves to be a dangerous monomaniac. Another willed act, Augie's marriage to Stella, is motivated as much by anticipated self-gratification as it is by love, and her observation, "You want all your troubles to be over all of a sudden . . ." points this up. Though his love remains firm, growing awareness gradually dispels his naïve romantic notion of her:

I said that Stella lied more than average, unfortunately. She told me a number of things that weren't so; she forgot to tell me others that were so. For instance, she said she was getting money from her dad in Jamaica. There was no such party in Jamaica. She had never gone to college either. And she had never cared anything about Oliver. He wasn't the important man. The important one was a big operator whose name was Cumberland. (523-524)

What promised to be a panacea turns out a placebo and Augie is still moving, searching, hoping, at the end of the novel. "When striving stops, the truth comes as a gift—bounty, harmony, love, and so forth." But there is no end to Augie's striving and there are no gifts in Bellow's world; the best he has to offer is hope.

Passivity is a feature which reappears throughout Bellow's work. With the exception of his most recent protagonist, Eugene

Henderson, who is dramatically different, all of his principal characters are viewers rather than doers, recipients of the action generated by those around them. The "dangling man" of his first book, Joseph, who, after a year of purposeless waiting, can only cry "Long live regimentation" when he is about to replace a frightening freedom in the unpredictable outside world with a secure subservience in the Army; the victim of his second, Asa Leventhal, who allows himself to be exploited by the anti-Semitic Allbee; and the harried Tommy Wilhelm of "Seize the Day," who describes himself as "the man beneath"—all share with Augie his passivity. Bellow's concept of character may be seen as a tacit indictment of a society which celebrates and respects most of all the active, self-made man, the hero of a thousand Chamber of Commerce luncheons. Joseph's brother, Amos, for example, will undoubtedly profit materially as a consequence of the war; however, Joseph himself "would rather die in the war than consume its benefits." He says, "When I am called I shall go and make no protest. And, of course, I hope to survive. But I would rather be a victim than a beneficiary." According to Bellow, in order to be an active figure in twentieth-century America it is necessary to be somewhat cynical and ruthless and something of an exploiter. If one is to shape the world to one's will, it is necessary to be hardened, so that when one steps on others the crunching does not become noisome. The active individuals (Tamkin, Dr. Adler, Grandma Lausch, Einhorn, Simon, *et al.*) are not afraid to inflict cruelty on others. "Be a little more hard-headed, will you?" is what Amos advises his brother, and this lack of "worldly-wiseness" is typical of all these passive characters. Virtue exists in Bellow's fictional world, but it is not manifested by good deeds; rather it is negatively expressed by those individuals who do not exploit others but who instead are sensitive to the hurts which human beings may inflict on one another. This is not to say that they do not, on occasion, prove capable of making others suffer. The difference, however, is that when an Augie does so he undergoes a postlapsarian purgatory of self-recrimination:

I knew I had done wrong. And as I lay and thought of it I felt my eyes roll as if in search of an out. Something happened to my forgetting power, it was impaired. My mistakes and faults came from all sides and gnawed at me. They gnawed away, and

I broke out in a sweat, and turned, or felt the vanity of turning.
(400)

It is only outside the context of getting and spending, as Henderson (the legatee of a three-million-dollar inheritance—after taxes) shows, that one may even attempt to be active and virtuous at the same time.

II

Inasmuch as there is more than merely a generic relationship between Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Bellow's *Augie March*, I would like to amplify some of the observations I have made by using the eighteenth-century work as a foil. Not only are both novels episodic in form, launching likeable, susceptible, compassionate human beings on their peripatetic way through an unfriendly world they must somehow come to terms with, but there are many other parallels as well. For the general treatment of *Bildungs* common to the two is also reflected in the specific details. That Jones is a foundling finds its counterpart in the "adoptionability" of March. Each is notably good-looking, a snare for the committed equally with the casual, and even their physical stature is comparable. While Jones has his Sophia, "adorned with all the charms in which nature can array her; bedecked with beauty, youth, sprightliness, innocency, modesty, and tenderness, breathing sweetness from her rosy lips, and darting brightness from her sparkling eyes," March has Sophia's modern, if somewhat tarnished, equivalent—the movie starlet Stella. A brief stay in jail is also experienced by both. The sanguinity of Jones is impressive; turned upon by one he trusted, banished by his patron, and separated from his love, he can still respond to the Man of the Hill's tale of deception and concomitant misanthropy by saying, "I have lived but a short time in the world, and yet have known men worthy of the highest friendship, and women of the highest love." But it is as nothing compared with what amounts to "pollyannamation" in Augie, who, after enduring many of the same slings and arrows as Jones (including the broken pate), and still more, triumphantly announces, "Why, I am a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand and believe you can come to them in this immediate *terra incognita* that spreads out in every gaze. I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when

they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America." Fielding's plot takes his hero from a rural English setting, passes him through the alembic of humanity, and, after his adventures in the capital city of the land, dispatches him a happier, wiser man. Bellow likewise moves his fictional prototype from a provincial milieu—an island of Jews set amongst a sea of Poles—in Chicago, that great suburb of the world, to Paris, the capital.

This, then, is a sampling of what the two novels have in common, but it is the differences between Fielding's comic epic and Bellow's comic romance which afford the most revealing insights. One such difference is the moral values held by those whom the two young experimenters in life encounter. Fielding has placed his hero in the England of the 1740's and surrounded him with a group of avaricious opportunists who number in their ranks Blifils, Black Georges, Thwackums, Dowlings, Partridges, servants, and innkeepers. However, against these individuals motivated largely by self-interest, he has aligned the Allworthys, Sophias, Mrs. Millers, and Nightingales. Corruption exists in Jones's world but it is not a sufficiently vital force to overcome virtue permanently. In Augie's depression world of the 1930's, on the other hand, there are only the exploiters and the exploited, and even the victims have sullied reputations. For her own egoistical ends, Grandma Lausch dominates Rebecca March, but the feckless Mrs. March is herself not without taint. Disadvantages are turned to profit by the unscrupulously clever, as is apparent when Grandma Lausch, the New World "Machiavel," goes about promoting charity support. Einhorn, Bellow's Midwestern Ivar Kreuger, uses crippled legs to blackmail his family emotionally, and from his seat of power—his wheelchair—he cons the world. His belief, shared by many in the novel, is that "one should make strength from disadvantages and make progress by having enemies." Significantly, those he swindles are themselves swindlers, Mutchniks so intent on the minnow in front of them that they fail to see the shark behind. In the Chicago of Augie March, love itself is a weakness that the shrewd manipulator may capitalize on; it is a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder by such accomplished hawkers as that man of parts, the *shadchan* Kreindl. Simon, Jimmy Klein, Joe Gorman, Dingbat, Padilla—all of them are looking out

for number one, and the principal consideration which determines any course of action they choose is whether or not they can get away with it. Prudence and moral rectitude appear to have little relevance (or, more cynically, an inverse relationship) to success in the twentieth century of *Augie March*. Individuals are judged rather by "whether they screwed or were screwed, whether they themselves did the manipulating or were roughly handled, tugged, and bobbed by their fates; their frauds, their smart bankruptcies, the fires they had set; what were their prospects of life, how far death stood from them."

Evil and Violence are necessarily part of Tom Jones's experience, for they are very much a part of his eighteenth-century environment. But the beatings, the brawls, the rapes, the duels, the murders, the highway robberies, are placed in the context of a stable society characterized by a closed social structure and fixed values where they are plainly scored as aberrations. In spite of the fact that Tom's adventures take place against a setting of war—the 1745 invasion by the Pretender, Bonnie Prince Charlie—one feels little anxiety about his safety. True, senseless acts are committed, such as Fitzpatrick's attack upon Tom; nevertheless, there is a basic order and rationality underlying the world of Tom Jones which is not found in that of *Augie March*. Perhaps the crucial difference is that no longer does any sense of outrage exist, and the violence seems omnipresent. Senseless acts of hostility are committed and no one seems to care, not even the victims. *Augie* says of his childhood:

And sometimes we were chased, stoned, bitten, and beat up for Christ-killers, all of us, even Georgie, articed, whether we liked it or not, to this mysterious trade. But I never had any special grief from it, or brooded, being by and large too larky and boisterous to take it to heart, and looked at it as needing no more special explanation than the stone-and-bat wars of the street gangs or the swarming on a fall evening of parish punks to rip up fences, screech and bawl at girls, and beat up strangers. (12)

America's open social structure, while it permits one to achieve great wealth and status although born to poverty, has, as a consequence of the materialism it fosters, a degenerative effect upon morality, allowing Simon, for example, to receive a forced apology from the coal truck driver he has brutally pistol-whipped. Bellow's

notion of twentieth-century life (formed in the city) assumes the precariousness of human existence, and his chorus, the conscience of the modern state, is a rogue's gallery of "condom." Roger Touhy, Tommy O'Connor, Johnny Torrio, Jake the Barber, Big Hayes Hubacek, the O'Bannions, Colossimo, Capone, Aiello, Genna, Dillinger, would be, at the very least, an unsettling influence on any society, but particularly so when they are raised to the level of folk heroes, their doings followed with avidity by Coblins, their dress emulated meticulously by Dingbats, their success in crime affected laboriously by Gormans. In Augie's urban no man's land even the representatives of order are corrupt—a condition which seems to have changed remarkably little according to recent reports—and the price of admission includes none of the usual guarantees associated with cause-effect. Einhorn, speaking of Chicago, puts it this way:

"This city is one place where a person who goes out for a peaceful walk is liable to come home with a shiner or bloody nose, and he's almost as likely to get it from a cop's nightstick as from a couple of squareheads who haven't got the few dimes to chase pussy on the high rides in Riverview and so hang around the alley and plot to jump someone. Because you know it's not the city salary the cops live on now, not with all the syndicate money there is to pick up. There isn't a single bootleg alky truck that goes a mile without being convoyed by a squad car." (82)

The effect of this difference in moral climate in the two novels is that for Tom there are consequences, whereas for Augie there are merely alternatives. For Tom, Molly Seagrim means exile and Mrs. Waters means separation from Sophia. But for Augie, Willa Steiner means Lucy Magnus means Sophie Geratis means Thea Fenchel means Stella Chesney.

In spite of the fact that Bellow's version of humanity differs so significantly from that of Fielding, he does hold a comparable humanistic attitude concerning man's capabilities and potentialities. It is only the Einhorns who feel we are living today in "dreamed-out or finished visions." When Augie compares Einhorn to a Caesar, a Machiavelli, a Ulysses, he adds:

"I'm not kidding when I enter Einhorn in this eminent list. It was him that I knew, and what I understand of them in him. Unless you want to say that we're at the dwarf end of all times

and mere children whose only share in grandeur is like a boy's share in fairy-tale kings, beings of a different kind from times better and stronger than ours." (60)

It is evident that this is not what Bellow wants to say. For even if Augie's fate is not a great one, his quest is. In the novel, a large number of Bellow's allusions are literary, and many of his images are drawn from classical literature, mythology, and the Bible. While he will use these references (and historical ones, too) for comic effect by pointing up the ironic disparity between aspects of contemporary society and past times, often he does so to underscore the similarities that exist between then and now. If he describes Grandma Lausch as an exponent of the rhetoric of a "grayer, dimmer Castiglione," he also refers, with descriptive rather than comic intent, to Augie as "a survivor of Crassus's army," to Thea as "Danaë," and to Mrs. Renling as "pharaoh's daughter," indifferent to the origin of the foundling. Regarding mankind, twentieth-century vintage, Bellow has written:

"I do not believe that human capacity to feel or do really have dwindled or that the quality of humanity has degenerated. I rather think that people appear smaller because society has become so immense. Hugest of all are the fears that surround us. These are what makes it hard for us to determine our proper size and the importance of our deeds."

Though the difference between Tom's ethos and that of Augie is clear, this change and the corrupt nature of the contemporary moral climate should not be taken, according to Bellow, as an indication of the lessened worth of modern man.

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FOOTNOTES

1. In Stanley J. Kunitz, ed., *Twentieth Century Authors: First Supplement* (New York, 1955), p. 73.
2. "Deep Readers of the World Beware," *The New York Times Book Review*, February 15, 1959, p. 1.
3. Page references refer to the original editions of the novels: *Dangling Man* (1944) was published by the Vanguard Press and *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) by The Viking Press.
4. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. 326.
5. *Prairie Schooner*, XXXI, No. 2 (Summer, 1957), 103-110.
6. (November 6, 1959), xxxv.
7. Kunitz, p. 73.

Saul Bellow: Five Faces of a Hero

IHAB H. HASSAN

There was a time when men were heroes, and history was the record of their shining actions. But heroes now, we are told, have passed from the earth; they are more rare than the dodo and centaur; and history is recorded by the wrinkles on a face lost in the crowd.

Literature, which in some ways denies reality, denies this diminishing perspective in our history. It still manages to affirm the sense of human life. To this task, the hero of contemporary fiction is dedicated. We are just beginning to recognize his true role. We see him as actor and sufferer, rebel and victim, rogue and saint. We see him in the glass of fiction darkly, paradoxically, as man both typical and uncommon, the outsider in the street.

And this, too, is what we see in the novels of Saul Bellow: a hero with changing face and steady burden, an embodiment of the reality all of Bellow's works seek to define. The distance between Joseph, the hero of Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man* (1944), and Henderson, the hero of his most recent book, *Henderson the Rain King* (1958), seems large enough. But it is an elastic distance that stretches between the poles of victimization and rebellion and contracts again to the point where the poles of heroism nowadays must meet. This is precisely the central action in Bellow's fiction which keeps the everlasting Yes and eternal No in a state of perpetual tension. The aim of the action is to transform form into function, freedom into knowledge, and self-knowledge into love. Above all, its aim is to convince us that reality or experience or life—call it what we will—is worth all the agonies of human existence without ever needing to be intelligible. The prime function of Bellow's heroes, diverse as they may

seem, is to dramatize this assertion. For all of them—and even Joseph by negative implication—share Augie's faith when he asks, "How it is that human beings will submit to the gyps of previous history while mere creatures (like Thea's magnificent eagle) look with their original eyes?" Their faith, or rather the reader's faith as he partakes of their life, is simply that modern man has *not* reached the fag-end of history. This is a faith which only a close scrutiny of the evolution of Bellow's heroes can properly qualify.

* * *

Dangling Man shows an acutely contemporary awareness; it is hungry, bitterly ironic, introspective. The world it depicts is one in which man, seeking freedom, must finally deny it, in which the flayed moral sense can only express itself in futile or nasty gestures. It is precisely these unpleasant gestures that redeem Joseph from the impotence to which he is prey: they are the weak, scratchy tokens of his rage. Joseph—he has no paternity beyond his crisis, and no other names—seems a curious combination of Oblomov, Hamlet, Kafka's K., and Dostoyevsky's Underground Man. He sits in his room, awaiting the day's minor crises, while his wife, Iva, earns their living. He considers himself a moral casualty of a war that denies him the rewards both of liberty and commitment, a man condemned by a condemned age. His aim is *freedom*: the freedom to be, to understand, to disengage himself from everything conditioned. But nothing comes of it. His apparent disponibility serves only to accentuate his guilt, anxiety, doubt, soltitude—what can be done with freedom? An apprentice in suffering and humiliation, he knows that alienation is a "fool's plea," for the world lies within us. His debates with the Spirit of Alternatives—the spirit of unchosen choices—cannot resolve his metaphysical doubts. Death is the termination of all choices, death—or servitude. The only ironic wisdom he is vouchsafed flashes through one of his meditations: "We are all drawn to the same craters of the spirit, to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace. And, if the quest is the same, the differences in our personal histories, which hitherto meant so much to us, becomes of minor importance." In this crucial statement, Joseph betrays the cardinal spiritual conflict in Bellow's work: the conflict between freedom and reconciliation,

the first a personal and limited thing, the other, though individual still, attuned to the deeper harmonies of existence.

• But Joseph fails; he consents to escape from freedom. After writing an urgent note to his draft board, begging to be called up, he confesses, "I had not done well alone. I doubted whether anyone could. To be pushed upon oneself entirely put the very facts of simple existence in doubt. Perhaps the war could teach me, by violence, what I had been unable to learn during these months in the room. . . . The next move was the world's." Dangling man, disinherited, Jew, Joseph surrenders to the world. The price of his brief rebellion is victimization. "Who can be the earnest huntsman of himself when he knows he is in turn a quarry?" But in his failure we discern the greater failure of his milieu—a world brutalized by war, a society riddled by contradictions. And in the grim irony of his fate, through the comic contortions of skull-like laughter, we glimpse the imperatives of human freedom straining to discover its true limits. Ignominious defeat, carried to a certain intensity of awareness, invokes a dignity we are apt to ignore.

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Joseph attains an ironic knowledge of his own weakness, which is the weakness of all men in the absurd world they have helped create; Asa pushes his ironic knowledge of guilt to the threshold of love. In Bellow's second novel, *The Victim* (1947), the focus of disorder is anti-Semitism, and the hero is both the master and prey of moral ambiguities. Defence and accusation, action and consequence, make up the relentless dialogue of the novel, spinning giddily around the two main characters. Asa Leventhal and Kirby Allbee, antagonists who turn out to be alter egos in the same sinister farce. Leventhal is the Jew, a solitary man sprung from an environment of poverty and personal tragedy; he possesses a dour and quarrelsome sensitivity, a measure of violence and self-pity, tenderness and strength. Allbee is the anti-Semite, a suffering and insufferable creep, endowed at times with an insane lucidity of perception. He appears from nowhere, down and out, to accuse Leventhal of having contrived his ruin; gradually he takes over Asa's life and haunts his sleep. The two men are locked in a death struggle for the impossible meaning of innocence, for their

own and each other's soul—on trial here are not only Jew and Gentile, but Man.

In an obvious inversion of roles, Allbee poses as the victim. He is also a weird teacher. "Know thyself!" Allbee cries. "Everybody knows but nobody wants to admit." It is only when Leventhal stops feeling wronged by this mad and repulsive intruder, only when he begins to see in Allbee an example of misery and desperation greater than his own, that he begins to admit. Should he be forced to become his brother's keeper? "Why pick on me? I didn't set this up anymore than you did," Leventhal expostulates with himself. "Admittedly there was a wrong, a general wrong. Allbee, on the other hand, came along and said, 'You!'" The hero of ambiguities creates the condition to which he is a victim; the monstrous mummery of guilt includes victim and oppressor alike. But knowledge alone is not enough. Man must finally stand up for his fellow man. Asa is compelled to stand up for Kirby whether he is friend or foe.

The final recognition of Leventhal comes when, realizing his own share of guilt, he reflects, "Everybody committed errors and offences. But it was supremely plain to him that everything, everything without exception, took place as if within a single soul or person." Discovering his own identity in "error," the hero must relinquish that identity again to the common soul of human kind. Is this knowledge not akin to love?

* * *

Leventhal, I have said, brings self-knowledge to the threshold of love. Tommy Wilhelm, the protagonist of *Seize the Day* (1956), transforms the knowledge of defeat into a vision of acceptance even broader than love. When we first see Wilhelm in the novelette, he is already in his middle forties, an established failure in the business as in the private world, and the pattern of his past errors has worked itself out in a tightening net. Agonized, accountable, humiliated, begging often but never really crawling at Life's feet—the contrasts between him and his egotistic father are masterfully executed—Wilhelm finally emerges as the kind of figure who gives to words like "mercy" and "love" a peculiar resonance.

The irony of the novella, of course, is that the only person

to whom Wilhelm can turn in the great city is Dr. Tamkin, a charlatan and swindler, a combination healer, inventor, and sage. Tamkin teaches Wilhelm that the "real universe" is to be found "in the present moment—seize the day"—and that the "pretender soul," which is full of the world's vanities, is implacably opposed to the "true soul," whose burden is solitude and function is love. "Might the name of his true soul be the one by which his old grandfather had called him—Velvel?" Wilhelm wonders. The climax of the book comes when Wilhelm, feeling the full force of desperation—when "the lonely person howls from his window like a wolf"—stumbles into a funeral parlor. The corpse he sees, a body composed and serene, which might have been that of his father, strikes him in a terrible moment of illumination as the charnel house of man himself, the body of Wilhelm or Wilhelm's children, the corpse of all desires composed by human mortality. The "great knot of ill and grief" in Wilhelm's throat bursts and he cries uncontrollably, but it is not, as some critics crassly believe, tears of self-pity he sheds. They are tears of piercing insight and they release a shuddering music: "He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow, [and by the way that can only be found through the midst of sorrow,] through torn sobs and cries[,] he found the secret consummation of his heart's ultimate need."* This is a vision, Bellow would like us to understand, that transcends defeat, transcends, in fact, both love and death because it fastens on the means of their reconciliation.

* * *

Joseph and Asa Leventhal are preys of ironies; Tommy Wilhelm very nearly attains to genuinely tragic stature. Yet all remain victim-heroes in so far as Wilhelm's description of himself as "the man beneath"—"Tear me to pieces, stamp on me and break my bones"—applies to the three men. Bellow's comic, roguish, and rebel hero—the other face of the coin—appears in *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953).

Tommy Wilhelm and Augie March are indeed both children of fate. But as the life of the first is ruled by error and ill-fortune,

* Parts of quotation between brackets appeared only in the novelette as published in *Partisan Review*.

the life of the second is ruled by luck and grace. The difference is the difference between a closed and an open circuit, a tragic and comic logic of destiny—the errors of Tommy define his situation, those of Augie simply multiply his choices.

Augie concurs with Heraclitus when the latter says that a man's character is his fate. Augie's character is a paradox. He seems at times too vague and easily diverted, a creature who shines only in the reflected light of others and is defined by the affectionate glances of the women he attracts. His brother Simon feels that he is "something of a *schlemiel*." But Einhorn discerns in Augie other and more essential qualities. He says to Augie, "you've got *opposition* in you. You don't slide through everything. You just make it look so;" and Augie agrees: "I did have opposition in me, and great desire to offer resistance and to say 'No!'" Augie's school is the varied and brutal city world, but his tough early training does not prevent him from developing a gift of vision or from remaining open to the highest bids of experience. It is this accountable dreaminess that sustains him through times of "special disfigurement and world-wide Babylonishness," that keeps him yearning for the "axial lines" of existence and "a proud, independent fate." Hence his conception of himself as "a servant of love," a neophyte, that is, in the luminous mystery of acceptance. In the end, the path Augie traces in life is that of a man who simply takes a chance on what he is. This is not an effortless path; it requires, as Augie puts it, much "excavation and digging," a life underground. But our hero, who calls himself facetiously a "Columbus of those near-at-hand," also knows that though Columbus was sent back in chains, and may have thought of himself as a flop in the bargain, it all didn't "prove that there was no America."

The final note of *The Adventures of Augie March* is not one of knowledge and freedom. It is not even one of love. It is the note of *laughter* sounded by the Norman maid Jacqueline, and it prompts Augie to say: "That's the *animal ridens* in me, the laughing creature, forever rising up." Laughing, for this latter-day picaro, is the enigma of enduring hope, and hope is the aspect under which the mystery of reality manifests itself to him. Yet Augie is confirmed into no society; he is finally bound to no one by ties or allegiances. His powers of laughter remain in delicate balance with his powers of denial. A rogue he is in some obvious

ways; but he is an outsider too, and a cheerful rebel against all the norms which his brother cynically accepts. This self-styled "servant of love" is truly a hero of circumstances who reveals to us the ludicrous play of Heredity and Environment and the more subtle play of Chance and human Purpose. What he reveals, therefore, is the play of reality itself, a sea on which man bobs, riding its surf or sinking beneath its tumultuous surface.

* * *

Chance is more clearly controlled by Purpose in Bellow's last novel, *Henderson the Rain King* (1958). Augie's life, though guided by the axial lines of existence, is still that of a lucky child of fate. But Henderson's life, though erratic, is the life of a passionate and driven seeker. In this lies the differences between the two heroes, and between the two kinds of comic responses they elicit.

In the fabulous story of Henderson, Bellow goes farther than he ever did towards freeing the individual quest from the enmeshing substance of society. To this end, the magic never-land of Africa is chosen for the setting. And the hero is made to enjoy certain advantages of birth and power which the heroes of romance traditionally enjoyed. Henderson is the wealthy scion of an ancient American family distinguished for scholarship and public service. Freed from external necessity, he is forced to answer that unappeasable voice in him which constantly cries, "I want, I want, I want"; forced to burst his spirit's sleep and carry his life to a certain depth; forced, again, to discover that service which performed may be the human retort to death. A man of gigantic size and enormous strength, at once violent and tender, he hauls his passionate bulk across the African wilderness like some buffoon or outlandish healer—his guiding image is that of men like Albert Schweitzer and Sir Wilfred Grenfell—seeking salvation and reflecting in his big suffering face, "like an unfinished church," all "the human passions at the point of doubt."

Henderson's search is, again, for reality—"The physical is all there, and it belongs to science. But then there is the noumenal department, and there we create and create and create." The true starting point of his quest is a quotation he discovers in his father's library: "The forgiveness of sins is perpetual and righteousness

first is not required." Because his disorderly life is so full of errors and remissions, Henderson is compelled to find redemption in a single act of charity or knowledge.

It is while Henderson is chopping wood at home, and a log hits his face, that it first occurs to him truth must come in blows—later in the book, he has the same recognition while wrestling with Prince Itelo. Yearning, he learns, is suffering, and suffering a kind of unhappy strength. Under the hypnotic influence of King Dahfu, however, Henderson comes to realize that a rage for living is not enough. Man must also put an end to his *becoming* and enter the realm of *being*, the only realm in which love is possible. To attain this state of being, human kind must turn to the beasts. The prophecy of Daniel—"They shall drive you from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field"—is finally consummated for Henderson in Dahfu's lion den. There the clamorous voice that used to cry, "I want, I want, I want," can now listen to other voices, "he wants, she wants, they want." Identity is found in communion and communion is reached out of the civilization we know. Man must live with the rhythm of things, for he cannot live forever against it. In the last moving scene of the book, Henderson, on his way back to his wife, Lily, on his way to start medical studies at 55, clasps an orphan child to his chest and runs about the homebound plane with him, "leaping, leaping, pounding and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence," knowing that though "for creatures there is nothing that ever runs unmingled," chaos does not run the whole human show, and ours is not a "sick hasty ride, helpless, through a dream into oblivion." Clown, braggart, breast-beater, a king of plenty and the spirit's drought, Henderson is the American hero who discovers at last that true innocence can be renewed only in the quixotic charity of pain. And for once the American hero does go back home again.

* * *

An artist is always a pilgrim in progress. Bellow's artistic progress reveals itself in the stages his heroes mark. Joseph cries, in the sweet bitterness of surrender, "Long live regimentation." Asa Leventhal, discovering the deviousness of human guilt, realizes that man is weak and yet finally accountable. Tommy

Wilhelm rises above the finality of death in a vision of universal compassion. Augie March, finding that everyone must know bitterness in his chosen thing, manages still to keep fate and character responsive to the common touch of joy. And Henderson comes to salvation through service and love. The movement, we see, is towards a resolution of the conflict between self and world; the movement is from acid defeat to acceptance, and from acceptance to celebration. All these heroes are in some way or other outsiders to the world they inhabit; all are on intimate terms with pain; and all affirm the sense of human life. The affirmation has an ironic knowledge of its limits. For if Joseph is the eternal victim, he is also victim to his own lack of resolution; and if Henderson is the eternal savior, he is at the same time a bungling and grotesque redeemer. Thus does the progress of Bellow's hero maintain a sense both of hope and humility. And thus does it disclose to us a *form* of human courage.

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Styron and the Students

ROBERT GORHAM DAVIS

If the circumstances under which one has read an author have helped to determine one's opinion of him, it seems only fair to say what they were.

I read—or reread—William Styron's novels in Vermont out-of-doors in July, very conscious of color all about me, of white clouds, and of fields and trees of all shades of rich green, and the Adirondacks blue in the distance against the paler blue of the sky. I was at a summer session trying to teach teachers to write and to teach writing. I felt that through them I was perhaps affecting the literary tastes and sensibilities of hosts of unknown youngsters.

The teachers, many of them in their middle twenties, were responsive and interested, but because they knew that their professional competence was being put to the test, they tended to become stilted, self-conscious and jargonish in what they wrote. Or perhaps they had been so before they arrived, such being the nature of the training which most of them, unfortunately, had received.

I tried to get them to look at their experience more directly and freshly. I said that it was no good my warning them—or their warning their pupils—to avoid abstractness and triteness. You had to know how to find something to put in its place. Above all I talked about language, offering them a lively range of examples. Nothing in their writing should be dead or inert. Their words and phrases must be bold, vivid, amusing, discriminating, idiomatic, inventive, figurative, concrete—oh, all sorts of things which I realized that I was usually quite incapable of myself. "Consider Shakespeare," I said to them. "Consider the Bible, especially the book of Psalms."

And then after a while I began saying, "Consider Styron." Styron had, in a sense, become my best pupil. Each day I had

gone home from class to sit on the porch and read *Set This House on Fire*. And each time I found Styron doing exactly what I had asked for in class—and doing it in such generous measure! As I compared his work with that of—so to speak—the other pupils, I grew more and more enthusiastic. What talkers his characters were! How much he could do with an incident, a landscape, a mood! I began reading representative Styron passages in class.

Styron, for instance, described Mason Flagg's mistress as having, though she was a Smith graduate, "that chic, touching vacuity seen on the mortuary images of Egyptian queens." Could a single one of my students have managed "chic, touching vacuity"? But of course they would have had to think of the Egyptian queens first, and this would not have happened unless they had really looked freshly at mortuary images and thought about them and had them ready for reference when the right moment came. This example gave me the chance to make once more the point that observation comes first, and that choice of language can be dealt with pertinently only when there is something for that language to express.

When Styron, or rather his *alter ego* Peter Leverett, went with Cass Kinsolving to the cabin of the dying peasant, "the stench of the place," he wrote, "met me at the door, clamping itself down over my face like a foul green hand . . . , a sweet tainted odor as of meat gone bad which blossomed in the air as vividly as a color." I remembered a similar image from *The Long March*. The troops had thrown themselves down beside a waterway where "phosphorescent globes made a spooky glow among shaggy Spanish moss, and a rank and fetid odor bloomed in the darkness—not the swamp's decay, Culver realized, but Mannix's feet."

I asked my students why the word "green" seemed right in the phrase "a foul green hand." They answered readily enough that green was the color of mold, of scummy ponds, of decayed flesh. Of course they had been greatly helped by the last part of that sentence, where Styron actually included the words "color" and "meat gone bad." My question would have been a little more challenging if I had broken the sentence off with the phrase "green hand." But this would have been to edit Styron, to make his effects a little less obvious and explicit, to keep him from going on too long, from overdoing, as I now had to agree that he often did.

This fault was brought home to me largely by the students

themselves. Though usually ready to accept higher authority (mine), they began to question my use of Styron as a model to follow. Perhaps they were a little jealous.

Early in the course I had given them an exercise in describing an emotional experience without using words of emotion. I knew that their tendency was to be over-explicit and analytical, and I had taken the Hemingway line with them. I quoted from *Death in the Afternoon* where he said that instead of naming emotions, you put down "what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced."

The students pointed out that this was by no means true of many of the Styron passages which I read them, that not content with one general term for an emotion or quality, he often threw in two or more which overlapped. Peter Leverett felt not only "shock" after the accident with the motor scooter, but "shock and horror" together. The wife of the protagonist Culver of *The Long March* was not only a "tenderly passionate wife," but "loving" as well, a "loving, tenderly passionate wife," as Styron puts it. When Culver felt a hunger, it was a "deep vast hunger." Captain Mannix's look, at the end of that novel, was one of "tortured and gigantic suffering." Mason Flagg in *Set This House on Fire* had a "slick, arrogant, sensual, impenitently youthful, American and vainglorious face." When Flagg, playing Cagliostro or Svengali, was about to compel Cass to put on an obscene display of himself before the movie actors, he had a "mean and evil glint" in his eye.

But how, the students protested, taking my teaching too literally, does one observe an eye—or the glint in an eye—as mean or evil? Is there something in the eye itself which shows this, or is it to be seen (still assuming the Hemingway viewer) by looking for what is actually there, as indicated by the whole expression of the face? Not to mention the fact that the phrase is rather trite and melodramatic. I remembered the Colonel in *The Long March* "whose eyeballs rolled white with astonishment" when Captain Mannix spoke rudely to him. Here the action was indeed in the eyes themselves. It could also be seen in horror movies in the days before conscience about ethnic groups became so strong. A Negro was included in the cast just so his eyes could roll comically white in this fashion when the ghost or monster came out of the hidden door.

I granted that Styron occasionally used stock effects or tossed in a good many general terms. In fact I read to them a single sentence of less than seventy words toward the end of *The Long March* that contained the words, "misery," "passionate," "prayerfully," "feverishly," "pain," "agony," "rapture," "desire." But I observed that William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe heaped up terms this way too. Southerners favor heightened words of feeling; they relish grandiloquence. Hemingway, on the other hand, came from the cold shores of a Michigan lake and admired the upper-class British mode of speech, preferring, like them, understatement or simplification where emotion was concerned.

The answer was unsatisfactory to me if not to them. I turned over Styron's pages after class, and found plenty of other instances which the students could have cited against me if they had known of them. Occasionally, certainly, Styron wrote in the manner of sentimental melodrama. When Poppy, the little loyal wife, observed Cass's public humiliation, "deep silent sobs racked her gentle frame, and she bit in anguish at the sleeve of her kimona." Even when Mason Flagg's talk was gamiest, it was also a little factitious and stilted, as when he was seeing Peter Leverett off on the boat to France. "'Allons-y, Petesy!' he yelled into my ear. '*Pour chercher la twat française.*' I got half a mind to ship on board with you for this cruise and flush out some of that quail on the Rue Bonaparte. What's the matter, Pierre? You look rather down in the mouth for a man who's going to clash head-on with some of the choicest flesh in Christendom.'"

Often Styron did sound like Wolfe. When a thunderstorm came up, Culver could hear the shrill cries of girls near the swimming pool, "voices young and lovely and lost in the darkness, the onrushing winds," and he wondered about Mannix, "where he was now, great unshatterable vessel of longing, lost in the night, astray at midcentury. . . ." And there was frequent hyperbole. When the drunken Cass ended his eloquent half-mocking, half-earnest speech on tragedy to the guests at the party, he stumbled and, with easy theatrical effect, pitched forward onto the keyboard of a piano "in a thunderous uproar of flats and sharps." In the field tent in *The Long March* one could see "Mannix's huge distorted shadow cast brutishly against the impermeable walls by a lantern so sinister that its raging noise had the sound of a typhoon at sea." Does a typhoon at sea make

no more effect than a lamp in a tent? Does a drunk pitching forward onto piano keys make quite such a thunderous uproar as a symphony orchestra working up to the conclusion of Brahms's First or Second Symphony? When Flagg's father, in a scene straight out of *Huckleberry Finn*, faced down the avenging oystermen and ordered them out of house, "the two men seemed to shrivel and bend before his fury like willows in a gale."

Major literature is full of hyperbole, of course, and of big scenes. Characters are put in situations which subject them to every kind of test and strain, demand of them superhuman effort and the comprehension of angels. Naturally they cry out in their anguish, and ransack the physical universe for images which will give some faint sense of what they suffer within. So spoke Lear, Oedipus, Ahab. By having Cass Kinsolving quote so often from Sophocles, Styron suggests that these are his standards, that this is the kind of intensity which he wishes to attain.

Pondering this, I thought once more of my demands upon the students when I set them to writing about an emotional experience without using words of emotion. It was the assignment which made them so critical of Styron. They had supposed that I was laying down rules for what is generally desirable in imaginative literature. I had started off with the topic of emotion, and made quite a lot of it. It seemed to me that a young writer's facing thoughtfully the nature of his emotions might serve a double purpose. Emotions might tell him what in his experience was most worth writing about, and they might suggest the particular dramatic form in which the emotion-causing events should be cast. I drew diagrams on the board showing how pity, fear, love and hate "moved" one toward or away from an object, and what patterns of conflict ambivalent emotions created.

"Motion," "emotion," "motives" and "motivation" were after all, I pointed out, the same word. This was when I invoked Hemingway, and said that what the creative writer had to do was to imagine a sequence of motions, a particular sequence of external events, which produced, corresponded to, or expressed, the inner actions which we call emotions. The words "motives" and "motivation" are important too. Actions when sequential can be consequential. The imagined world must be a meaningful world, with its own laws. This world is not created by the emotions, but acts as judge of them. When actions are truly represented in their

own consequential interrelationships, then we can tell whether the emotions which they evoke are adequate to their objects. We know when the emotions are sentimental, inappropriate, excessive, when they reflect rather the state of the experiencing subject than the state of the world.

Approaching Styron in this way, I realized that the inflatedness and slightly false intensity which the class and I had observed in his language was not a matter of language only. Indeed, it could not be, according to the view of language which I had been expounding to them. It was a matter of the relationship between characters and events.

Styron's characters are always feeling things so intensely because they are in extreme physical states, which usually have no necessary connection with the events being experienced. They are exhausted, drunk, injured, ill. This is not, come to think of it, the usual condition of the tragic hero; its effect is to make events not more real but less. Styron depends too much on the vocabulary of dream or nightmare. When Milton Loftis, drunk, wandered away from the football game to end up bleeding in a ditch, he was "possessed by the belief that all this was a dream: his search, Peyton, even his fear and agony, were all part of an impossible illusion." Confronting the forced march, Culver "felt suddenly unreal and disoriented," shifted into another dimension of space and time. Wife, child and home "seemed to have existed in the infinite past or, dreamlike again, never at all. . . ."

Cass Kinsolving's condition is the most extreme through all the climactic events of *Set This House on Fire*. Utterly drunk, ill and exhausted, he still manages to be unfailingly eloquent, to preoccupy himself with other people, and force himself to incredible feats of will. The narrator Peter Leverett (which means Peter Rabbit) is hardly Cass's equal, but he arrives in Sambuco so shaken up emotionally as a result of his collision with the motor scooter, that he says three gulps of beer "rocked me like dynamite, brought new lunatic dimensions to my exhaustion." Later on he describes himself as "profoundly drunk t m half a beer, my bones like jelly from fatigue, an ominous ticketing sounding in my ears, and, like some stricken diabetic, bizarrely lurching everywhere . . . so bedraggled was my state that much of the brief remainder of that afternoon I remember in fantastic scraps and snippets, as if illuminated by flashbulbs set off intermittently in the deepest

dark." Cass Kinsolving's great moment of illumination in Paris, his "presentiment of selflessness," was the cumulative result of "the weakness, the light-headedness, the booze, the vertigo."

If Styron's characters are in a constant state of exhaustion, it is not from hard work. Peter Leverett's government job is referred to, but not taken seriously dramatically. His extreme fatigue results not from trying to meet productive obligations or to change the world, but from pushing himself too hard on a pleasure trip after a night made sleepless by mosquitoes. Mannix's suffering occurs because he insists on completing a practice march with an injured foot, even though his Colonel orders him not to. The movie company is making a movie, but pointlessly, in a state of shattered morale, simply to use up lire credits. The company is in the novel to be a suitable audience for Cass's degradation, to strew equipment around for Peter Leverett to trip over, and to provide stars to impress him with. "I had an awe of these people almost teen-age in its dazzlement, and the hope now of some actual fellowship—no matter how fugitive—colored my imagination with a sudden iridescent allure."

Mason Flagg, very rich, devotes his energies to lechery and telling lies. Milton Loftis of *Lie Down in Darkness* is nominally a lawyer, but lives on his wife's inheritance and has absolutely nothing to do but drink. His drinking ruins everything. Cass Kinsolving is blind-drunk two-thirds of the time, partly because he cannot do his work as a painter. During the period of the main action of *Set This House on Fire*, Cass produces only false art and commissioned pornography. Presumably self-destructive forces are at play deep down in both Cass and Milton Loftis. Cass's problems get a little psychoanalytic exploration, but one feels in both cases that what is wrong with these men comes not from life but, through their author, from other books, specifically the novels of Scott Fitzgerald and William Faulkner. Quentin Compson and Dick Diver were also self-destructive, with highly self-conscious drives to doom which provided dazzling literary material without making much sense clinically.

The violent actions in *Set This House on Fire* are immediately consequential in the way violence has to be, but in their causes or motives, these actions are arbitrary and ungrounded. Cass kills Mason Flagg for a crime of which Mason was not actually guilty. The motor-scooter accident which made Peter Leverett take on

guilt-laden responsibility for another's life was an accident for him but not for his victim. The latter had a long history of accidents, was bent on his own destruction. Cass Kinsolving makes a superhuman effort of will to save the hopelessly ill peasant, but it is a thoroughly amateur enterprise, and though the operation is, so to speak, symbolically successful, the patient dies.

Most arbitrary of all is Cass's self-salvation, his decision to exist, to control his life, to have faith. This decision is prepared for philosophically—*Set This House on Fire* is more or less existentialist—but it is not required in any Aristotelian sense, does not come of dramatic necessity and certainly not tragic necessity. If Cass had been destroyed instead of saved, as Milton Loftis and his daughter Peyton were, the conclusion would have been less affirmative, but more plausible. The present ending is that of a nineteenth-century novel.

Styron has a right, of course, to construct an arbitrary pattern of events for his literary and philosophical purposes. But in *Set This House on Fire* there is no kind of order, social or otherwise, as there was in *Lie Down in Darkness*, which can be threatened by the arbitrary, or illuminated by it. Cass has wandered restlessly about Europe, wasting his substance, and making his family suffer for the sake of nightmarish, Rimbaud-like inner visions. More and more conventionally contemptuous of the Italians, Mason Flagg is in Italy to perform beastlinesses that he could have performed just as well elsewhere.

Cass, of course, does try to do good in Sambuco, for the family of the peasant girl whom he loves. But like other elements in *Set This House on Fire*, the love passages seem disjunctive and unreal. Though there is a tremendous amount of physical sex, or talk of it, there is no satisfied sex in love. Cass's wife, little Poppy, is a spirited, loving girl, charmingly portrayed. Though she and Cass have a brood of children, their sex life together is not described. Despite the book's freedoms, one feels that Styron would be a little shocked at the idea of doing so.

Cass feels an aching sexual longing for the peasant girl, but it derives its poignancy from not being satisfied. Like so many heroines of apparently serious American novels, she is a dream figure out of medieval romances or boyish fantasies. Cass "had watched her as she attended to the stricken man, and all her

beauty seemed enhanced and brightened by this desperate, gentle devotion. An angel, by God, he had thought, an angel—"

The day-dream quality of Cass's romance with the peasant girl is so close to that of Mason's romance in Yugoslavia during the war—made up, as it turned out, of whole cloth—that we wonder suddenly whether Mason's sort of *Great Gatsby* lie, which he was going to turn into a play, is not a paradigm of *Set This House on Fire* as a whole. For all its apparent richness, its elaborate plot, its violent action, perhaps the novel is a huge fiction in a double sense, worked up with great intensity and talent out of nothing, referring to nothing, meaning nothing.

I thought this because of the way I had been talking to my class, and yet I knew that the estimate must be wrong. There was so much of God's living created world in Styron's work, shimmering with beauty, and serving in all its changeability as the reflector of a thousand human moods. And Styron wrote with such gusto, such narrative power, such joy in re-creating experience, in making it larger than life and yet full of life. I remembered Cass's story of his soldierly love affair with the luscious little Watchtower girl. I had read it over three or four times with undiminished appreciation. Certainly Styron is one of the most talented and evocative workers with words of our whole American middle generation of novelists.

But the dissatisfaction evoked by the class discussion stayed with me. There is the world, I had told them, and there are words, but it is what comes in between that counts. This is what joins world and words, this is where meaning occurs. It happens in the heads of human beings who are acting in the world. In between the physical cosmos and the printed page is a certain kind of engagement with both ideas and experiences which leads a man to notice and to value certain sorts of things and to use certain sorts of words for them. Doing so, if he is a writer of fiction, he creates his own world which is different from the real world and yet not a mere world of words either. I found that I did not know what Styron's world was, or what he noticed in a way to make it his own, as I knew what Proust noticed, or Lawrence, Dreiser, Nelson Algren, Saul Bellow. I could at once recognize Scott Fitzgerald in Styron's novels, when he began borrowing from Fitzgerald, as he often did, but I did not know how I would recognize Styron in the work of someone younger than he, except

as the younger writer imitated what the class and I had come to regard as faults.

This is a negative report on a writer whose inventiveness, evocativeness and humor give me great pleasure and fill me at times—such is their brilliance—with awe. But I offer it as a true report of what happened to me when I read Styron under rather particular circumstances. I could have, perhaps, by an act of critical will, put all that out of mind, and seen purely the literary object as in itself it really is. But I doubt it. Such abstraction could also be an act of impoverishment, taking us further from truth. Since *Set This House on Fire* was an existentialist novel, it seemed right, this once at least, to let the reader have his existence too, and use it to test the novel by. At any rate this is what happened with me, near Middlebury, Vermont, in July.

Styron and the Fiction of the Fifties

DAVID L. STEVENSON

I

William Styron, brilliantly in his first work of fiction, *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951), and somewhat opaquely in his very recent *Set This House on Fire* (1960),¹ writes the peculiarly bleak, uncomfortable, largely a-social novel of the fifties. In company with such contemporary writers as Norman Mailer, Herbert Gold, Saul Bellow, George P. Elliott, and J. D. Salinger, he has given us the moral bewilderment and the unfocussed anxiety haunting some of the most serious minds of his World War II generation. And he has pushed his explorations of the nature and meaning of human value, in an existential world, to the point where the essential act of staying alive is itself at stake, is the central question of his novels. His created characters—Peyton Loftis in *Lie Down in Darkness* and Cass Kinsolving in *Set This House on Fire*—do not isolate themselves by private and catastrophic actions, after the fashion of an Othello, from a world which, otherwise, would have made existence possible and enjoyable for them. It is rather, for Styron's characters, that *being* as opposed to *non-being* is resolved out of the times and events of their lives by a contest between a moribund moral imagination and a sheer animal instinct for survival.

At the surface level of narrative event, Styron's first novel, *Lie Down in Darkness*, was a richly detailed portrait of the unresolvable emotional chaos which defined the between-the-wars marriage of Milton Loftis and his wife Helen. Against an upper-middle-class, Southern background of country-club dances and drinking, Episcopalian moral conformity, and Negro primitive

Christianity, the Helen Loftis of the novel clings with pathological, maternal devotion to the mentally retarded, crippled daughter Maudie, and her husband, Milton Loftis, over-indulges, in his half-sick role of father, the bright, seductive daughter Peyton. The central focus of the novel, however, is the suicide of Peyton herself, after the collapse of her own disastrous marriage. Perhaps in part the victim of her parents' unmitigated and fascinated hatred of each other, Peyton Loftis is shown to be more essentially the victim of the driving moral disorientation of the generation which came to maturity after World War II. It is not that Peyton actively sets out to destroy her own desire to live. It is rather that, for her, existence or death can be decided by no act of affirmation that can be isolated from the tumbled events of her life. The desperate moment of her suicide, I think, is almost wholly a question as to when the welling up in her of pure instinct for survival will cease.

Lie Down in Darkness was the first important post-war novel to demonstrate, both by its rather loose, episodic, unsynthesized structure, and by its assumptions concerning the nature of human reality and human value, that the novel, as novel, had undergone an actual and a verifiable metamorphosis,² that if it were to be taken seriously, it had to be viewed as having outgrown its old form and content as they had been set by the giants of the twenties and the thirties. Its first critics were, on the whole, favorably impressed by the quality of the writing it displayed, though the new "existential" atmosphere and tone of *Lie Down in Darkness* seems to have been puzzling to them.

Maxwell Geismar, for example, found the novel "practically perfect." He also noted, in praise of Styron's use of the visual, that "we are at all these ghastly parties, ceremonials, and festivals of a middle-class business society." And yet he could conclude of a book whose basic involvement was with the flight of coherency in our time, that it was "simply a domestic tragedy" (*Saturday Review*, September 15, 1951). The commentator for *Time* magazine, in his own inimitably patronizing way, perhaps recognized the essential attitudes of the novel toward the human condition more clearly than Geismar when he described Styron as "one more recruit for the dread-despair-and-decay camp of U. S. letters" (September 10, 1951).

Lie Down in Darkness seemed to me when I first read it (and as I have re-read it a number of times since) to be almost in a

class by itself in its power to create characters caught in the mood of a generation, hovering, in its daily lives, between a drugged conventionality, a faceless and soulless identification with the formalized pleasures of a class, and a terror of the meaninglessness of existence. And I think *Lie Down in Darkness* contains one of the most stunning passages in contemporary fiction, in Peyton Loftis's Joyce-like internal monologue as she strips herself to what she calls "this lovely shell" of her naked body, and plunges out the window to her death on the street below. But neither this novel nor those of Styron's most alert, most dedicated contemporaries have yet been generally accepted for the distinct triumphs they are, unlike and quite different from the triumphs of the novels of the twenty-five years between the wars. And an Arthur Mizener, for example, though he is willing to grant *Lie Down in Darkness* "real power," still insists (perhaps with the more tightly written, the more obvious content of a *Great Gatsby* in mind) that it loses stature by a "certain factitious solemnity about The Meaning of It All" (*New York Times Book Review*, June 5, 1960).

Styron's second major work of fiction, his recently published *Set This House on Fire*, is more explicitly and didactically contrived as an existential novel than was *Lie Down in Darkness*. It is written with a highly sensitive, clear control of language, but it remains somehow static, and oddly ineffective by comparison. *Set This House on Fire* opens with a prefatory, two-page quotation from a John Donne sermon, ascribing the fevers which rage through the human body and set it, as a house, on fire, and the horrors which seize the human soul as God's violent way of shaking a man, of tormenting him, into a sense of spiritual being, of spiritual existence. The narrative itself is largely the account of two men who, until the book's end, fiercely resist the existential implications and meanings of the fevers and the terrors of body and soul by which they are shaken. One of them, Mason Flagg, is a bright, rich American playboy, viewed for the longest stretches of the novel, as the lavish host to other rich Americans, in a rented palace in Southern Italy. He is presented as wholly unable to live in his own person, and existing only vicariously by using other people: a series of women sexually, men as flatterers and toadies. The other of the two men, Cass Kinsolving, is Flagg's principal fool and jester for most of the novel. He is an uneducated, not very bright, would-be painter who submits to incredible public

indignities and indecencies from Flagg in exchange for the alcohol which will keep him perpetually sodden. The point of view in the novel, the character through whose mind we appraise the anguished lives of Flagg and Kinsolving, is Peter Leverett, a young post-war American on the loose, spending a last weekend in Italy, where he is witness to Flagg's eventual murder by Cass, and the latter's redemption back into the world of being.

Taken page by page, the quality of writing in Styron's new novel is very high. I cite as one example this skillful capture in words of the special tone and mood of a Sunday in New York:

The slow, late awakening in the midst of a city suddenly and preposterously still, the coffee cups and the mountainous tons of newspapers, the sense of indolence and boredom. . . . It is a time of real torpor, but a time too of a vague yet unfaltering itch and uneasiness . . . because in this most public of cities one's privacy is momentarily enforced and those old questions *What am I doing? Where am I going?* are insistent in a way they could never be on a Monday. (7)

I cite as another example the quick, easy grace with which Styron gives the reader a generalized sense of what it would be like to be driving a small, open car through the Italian summer night:

My headlights kindled fire in the long lanes of poplars, the underbellies of their leaves a treasure of rustling silver, and in sleeping villages with Latin-book names—Aprilia and Pontinia—as white and as hushed as sepulchers. . . . Above me bright stars wheeled across the heavens, but south in the open country all was black as death . . . stretching out on all sides into infinite darkness. (25)

And yet for all the page-by-page brilliantly sketched detail of the book, and for all one's wishing that it might have been Styron's *Crime and Punishment*, his *Set This House on Fire* is truly and surprisingly a novel *manqué*. And its defect is not in the formal structure of the narrative, I think, nor in its insistently philosophical presentation of its subject matter. The book is, to be sure, curiously organized as a series of teasing and tentative minor revelations, a series of slow steps around, rather than toward, the central revelation of the action: Flagg's rape of a young Italian girl

and Kinsolving's killing him, in retaliation. Moreover, Peter Leverett, as observer and source of the point of view, constantly avoids thinking about this central event, and thereby keeps us from really seeing it clearly until the very end of the novel. As Donald Malcolm commented somewhat truculently of this aspect of the book, in his *New Yorker* review, "Styron manages the unusual feat of stimulating the reader's curiosity without ever really arousing his interest" (June 4, 1960).

Set This House on Fire has also seemed to some of its immediate critics too self-consciously, too exclusively, Cass Kinsolving's existential *Angstgeschrei*. Mizener speaks of the novel's "fashionable metaphysical trimmings," and feels that the sharply observed material of the book "is solemnly hopped up." Cass, perhaps, is too often made to comment too obviously on his own flights from everyday reality. We follow him through one after another of his drunken debaucheries, and then hear his spiritual retching, his complaints of being "sick as a dog inside my soul" and unable to figure out "where that sickness came from." And the novel ends on an almost homiletic note, with Cass's Sartre-like explanation of his sudden flight from the confines of burning lunacy into ecstatic existence:

... As for being and nothingness, the one thing I did know was that to choose between them was simply to choose being, not for the sake of being, or even the love of being . . . but in the hope of being what I could be for a time. This would be an ecstasy. (500-501)

As I see it, however, the basic defect of the novel, and a defect which keeps the whole of *Set This House on Fire* from achieving the stature one could wish for it, is that its materials are everywhere "un-novelized." The special distinction of fiction, its essential difference from other kinds of writing, is that it cuts itself off from the actual reality it is imitating, and exists separately, as a self-contained microcosm. At its highest moments, indeed, it can seem even *more* real than actual fact. The odd difficulty in *Set This House on Fire* is that the individual scenes, the individual characterizations, accumulate, but they remain inert, they do not achieve their potential content. It is as if the imaginative materials of the book had been held too long or too lovingly in the mind of the writer, and had taken on a significance

for him that he takes for granted and fails to project in his writing. They do not cross over into the house of fiction.

Gross examples of this kind of thing are scattered throughout the whole book. In its early pages, for instance, the teller of the story, Peter Leverett, gives in maddening detail a conversation with his father in which the latter attacks the Eisenhower administration. This was meant, one might guess, to suggest the flight of sense, of intelligibility, in the outside political world which we all inhabit, in order to make clear that this was the special moment in time during which Cass Kinsolving was making his own private and personal flight from coherence. But this conversation, as it occurs in the novel, merely seems strange and inconsequential. Similar in effect, I think, is the sudden, and fictionally un-assimilative appearance of a Reverend Dr. Irvin Franklin Bell at the beginning of Mason Flagg's raffish party of Hollywood celebrities (during which Flagg rapes his servant girl). Bell, his "cheeks plumped up in a sickly, illicit smile" at the goings on, is a sort of parodic sketch of a Norman Vincent Peale, a character as out of place at Flagg's orgy as a drunken stagehand stumbling across the scene as Desdemona is being smothered. Other gross examples of the un-novelized materials floating about in *Set This House on Fire* would, I think, include most of Leverett's thoughts about himself, and especially about his various love affairs. This material was no doubt meant to characterize Leverett for us. But as it is incorporated into the novel, it achieves the nonsignificance for the reader of the sudden and embarrassingly personal revelations of a rather casual acquaintance.

Much more destructive than these examples, however, is the curiously un-novelized dialogue. It attempts to maintain a driving momentum and vitality by maintaining separable and interestingly individualized speaking voices for its two principal characters, Mason Flagg and Cass Kinsolving. This voice separation is attained, however, at the cost of fictional reality. Flagg is given a language of self-mocking sentimentality, painfully uninteresting, that grates on one's ears as if heard not within but outside the novel. As an example, the character Peter Leverett is almost always "Petesy" or "Dollbaby" to Flagg. And Flagg describes his own divorce: "Weep, weep for Mason and Celia, Peter, we've gone to Splitsville." Cass Kinsolving, equally grating, speaks the half-grammatical language of a "natural" man driven frantic; and he is

also heard outside the novel. He repeats the word "bleeding" so many times that one begins to wince as one turns the page ("I'll pop you in the bleeding mouth"). He is also made to speak with a kind of half-witted sense of the value of tonal emphasis, painful to follow for the many pages of the novel, and suggested on the printed page by putting one or two of his words, per paragraph, in italics ("They forced me, *drug* me there—do you understand what I mean?").

It is difficult for me to accept *Set This House on Fire* as a defective novel, in part no doubt because of the power and the brilliance of *Lie Down in Darkness*. But one needs to keep one's perspective in such things. One remembers that Norman Mailer, after creating *The Naked and the Dead*, has stumbled through much un-novelized fiction, from *Barbary Shore* to *Advertisements for Myself*. Salinger's two most recent *New Yorker* pieces on members of his Glass family are in the same category. And there are (for me, at any rate) many bad, un-fictionalized moments in Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* which even the loose, picaresque formula of the book fails to sustain. Archibald MacLeish has given us an un-dramatized J.B., and even Shakespeare, at the height of his career, was capable, one may care to remember, of *Timon of Athens*. The failure of *Set This House on Fire* was described with xenophobic, though cheerful, insolence by the reviewer for *Time* as the failure to remain patriotically within the confines of Western moral tradition: "Styron's images of evil . . . are vivid but despairingly un-Christian and even un-Greek in their fatalism" (June 6, 1960). The failure to me is the honorable one of a powerful writer's inability to shake loose a wholly created thing, or entity, from the rich materials with which he has chosen to become involved.

II

Even though his second novel is never, I think, fully realized, it is important to observe of Styron that both *Lie Down in Darkness* and his recent *Set This House on Fire* have helped define the nature of the new and major serious fiction of his generation. It is important because there has been an uneasy and insistent disappointment with this fiction, expressed both in such official organs of our culture as *Time*, and by such reputable critics as

a Mizener or an Alfred Kazin. And the disappointment seems to come, in part at least, from an unwillingness to accept the substance of this new fiction in the main stream of American writing today as a valid—or perhaps only as an endurable—reflection of our post-war life.

By contrast, the much smaller efforts of competing and minor coterie writing in America of the post-war years (the novel of meticulously cultivated emotional debilitation) have actually fared somewhat better with the critics. The most distinguishing trait of this fiction has been that its perceptual impulses are easily named, and strike only through the thin, surface layer of subject matter. Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, Tennessee Williams' *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*, and Mary McCarthy's *The Company She Keeps* can serve as examples. They are neatly designed, truly "fictionalized" novels, and a pleasure to read. But the chief perceptual gratification which they give us is a view of our own uncomfortable knowledge of the obsessive sexuality of our time leering out at us from the actions of their characters. Such fiction is easily admired for its skill, but it only stirs our minds enough to keep the concept of fiction as a way of perception, a way of deep communing between writer and reader, alive and faintly breathing.

Styron's kind of novel, on the other hand, has been preoccupied with the emotionally marginal lives of men and women clinging to existence, or letting go of it, outside the warm, platitudinous American world of the advertized dream. It has concerned itself with the deepest private strivings, the deepest private agonies, of men and women (Styron's Peyton Loftis and Cass Kinsolving, Saul Bellow's Tommy Wilhelm in *Seize the Day*, Norman Mailer's Sam and Eleanor in *The Man Who Studied Yoga*, Herbert Gold's Burr Fuller in *The Optimist*, George P. Elliott's Jackie in *Parktilden Village*, perhaps Salinger's Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*) living by a raw, naked sensibility, unsupported either by a definable personal philosophy or by the codes and admonitions of institutionalized culture or religion. And the mortal despair which floats just below the surface of the major fiction of the past decade, of which Styron's work is a significant part, has been its richest communication.

The serious critics of this main stream of American writing since World War II, out of timidity in confronting its substance,

perhaps, have tended to argue that the new writers, merely as writers, have failed to come up to the hopes and expectations set by their immediate predecessors, writing between the two wars. John W. Aldridge, for example, called his largely adverse account of the first showing of the post-war fiction, *After the Lost Generation* (1951). And in commenting on Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*, Aldridge remarked that the novel was full of "some stuff" which the writer could not "bring to light and objectify." In back of this judgment was the implication that there had been a serious falling off in some absolute quality of American writing; that the fiction of the fifties was off to a bad start, and had almost consciously set a level of achievement for itself considerably below that established by the best of our writers of the twenties and thirties.

It is only fair to note that Aldridge has not stood alone. The new and serious fiction of the decade following the publication of *After the Lost Generation* has not been met by an especially receptive or understanding criticism, one truly conscious of a peculiarly unstable world of event and disintegrating value with which the contemporary writer must cope, a world wholly lacking the comparatively simple moral insights confronting a Sinclair Lewis or a Hemingway. Leslie Fiedler, for example, greets the most characteristic efforts of the new writers with elegant excoriations.³ Alfred Kazin, one of the most respected of critics, writing in *Harper's* for October, 1959, finds Norman Mailer, in *The Deer Park*, sharing with Paul Bowles, in *The Sheltering Sky*, the "same essential atmosphere of paralysis, of numbness that results when people feel themselves to be lost in the pursuit of compulsion." Kazin describes Salinger as "competent and interesting," but lacking in strength. He labels Herbert Gold's style, in *The Man Who Was Not With It*, as "falsely robust." And he complains in general of "the dimness, the shadowiness, the flatness, the paltriness, in so many of the reputable novelists" of the fifties. Even Granville Hicks, who in his weekly reports in the *Saturday Review* is the most consistent admirer of this present generation of novelists, does not really attempt to define the direction or the nature of their work. He is content to write praise in avuncular generalities. He will risk telling us that Saul Bellow, in his recent novel *Henderson the Rain King*, is writing with "wisdom and power." But Hicks remains too reluctant a witness for the new

novel to make explicit what the wisdom is, and where the power.

It is no doubt true, for reasons of our cultural history, that the major fiction published in America between the two wars by such dominant figures as Sinclair Lewis, Dos Passos, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Steinbeck, created its own immediate self-justification in a way impossible to the serious novel today. It was able to leave its first readers with an acute sense that without it they would have been tangibly impoverished in some difficult-to-define, but deeply felt, awareness of themselves, of their generation, of the contours of the reality of their age. This earlier fiction was immensely concerned with evaluating the basic and shifting social and personal codes and values its audience still clung to, with the ways in which its members sought, and often failed to find, an interesting or at least an endurable mode of existence in their particular culture. This fiction was not, in any very limiting sense, didactic. But such novels as Lewis's *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* trilogy, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* and *Grapes of Wrath*, were all "sociological" in their concerns, if one may use the word rather lightly. And they were all written for an audience which remembered a stable and an apparently purposeful world.

The new Styron, Bellow, Gold novel of our time, because of the Stygian chaos and old night in which it must be written, excludes the morally or philosophically shy from its audience. Perhaps it has failed to capture the admiration of its critics, and the sizable audience devoted to the fiction of the twenties and thirties, because it has not been tempted (or able, now) to encompass the substantial areas of human experience which the very titles *Main Street* and *U.S.A.* suggest. It has not tried to create the large, usable social images of American life of these earlier works, whereby a post-World War I generation of American readers, eager for instruction, anxious to lose a provincial morality, a political, theological, and cultural innocence, was led into a new maturity. The names of the characters in our present-day fiction have not become a part of the national language after the fashion of a *Babbitt*, a *Robert Jordan*, the *Joads*, to act as the symbols for our way of looking at a world.

How well this new American fiction has been written is still a matter of subjective opinion on the part of individual members

of its audience. At the level of language I would argue that today's serious novel is certainly as good as that written by the old giants of the between-the-wars. A Paul Bowles or a Truman Capote as examples of coterie writing, a Styron, a Mailer, as representative of fiction in the main stream of serious writing, certainly has as sharp, as sensitive, as intelligent a control of words as had ever a Dos Passos, a Steinbeck, a Hemingway. But if one turns to the substance of the new major fiction of the fifties, one has to observe that it has made reader and critic alike uncomfortable in a new way. It is not the discomfort of a Lewis, a Cather, a Hemingway which provoked us to unburden ourselves of an outworn, small-town esthetics and a frayed, puritan morality. It is rather the discomfort of provoking in us a deeply-rooted sense of the possible meaninglessness of existence, of making us aware of characters (Peyton Loftis, Cass Kinsolving) more neurotic than we are who may seem to be (alas!) a heightening and mirroring of our own worst moments.

We can now concede that the brief quarter-century of American writing which produced *Main Street*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, has become our history. We might also risk admitting that the new fiction of our post-war generation has attempted to commune with its readers at a deeper and less purely sociological level. A Styron, in his successful *Lie Down in Darkness*, evokes a world of complex, half-conscious perceptions, feelings, attitudes concerning the meaning of love and sex. He uncovers our most profound awareness of the fragile nature of the dogmatic and institutionalized values of our culture when ultimate questions of being and non-being are involved. His novels, like those of his major contemporaries, are attempts at communications, ways of apprehending, some bitter sense of the flight of moral congruity in our age. With Bellow's character Henderson, in his *Henderson the Rain King*, with his insatiable *cupiditas*, his exuberant, aimless, witless, "I want, I want," and with Styron's Peyton Loftis with her intolerable longing for nothingness, we find merely the complementary extremes of the characters of our new fiction: all of them as rudderless and adrift in the unknowable condition of existence as a Hamlet or a Lear.

That this sort of novel has been written at all is a tribute to the high seriousness, and the willingness to take a risk, of our young writers. Most of our society, no doubt, thinks itself little

impoverished by its ignorance of this major fiction of the past decade. And I would agree that to the casual reader of novels of light intent, a novel by a Styron which attempts to communicate the deeply relevant in the human condition must seem of slight importance. But to the truly serious reader, concerned with fiction's role in one's leading the examined life, it must seem, in Tillich's way of putting such things, that these new novels of the fifties are, for the most part, not metaphysically hopped-up, but genuinely concerned with the ultimate and the unconditional. Peyton Loftis, as she evaluates her life before ending it, Tommy Wilhelm, in Bellow's *Seize the Day*, as he weeps through the funeral of a man he has never known, Burr Fuller, in Gold's *The Optimist*, who, like Cass Kinsolving, decides finally to accept being as a kind of ecstasy, are all gratifications of our most deeply rooted perceptions of the nature of the human condition: moments of being surrounded by the terror and the allure of the timeless dark. Our new generation of literary artists has abandoned social man for the unconditioned in man. Their novels may seem only small and partial illuminations to their critics. But it is both fascinating and reassuring, I think, to have even their partial illuminations of the unconditional elements in man constantly flickering in the high winds.

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FOOTNOTES

1. I omit from my discussion Styron's novelette, *The Long March* (1952), a well-executed piece of documentary fiction in conventional narrative form.
2. As I have tried to demonstrate in "Fiction's Unfamiliar Face," *Nation* (November 1, 1958).
3. See his article, "Some Footnotes on the Fiction of 1956," *The Reporter* (December 13, 1956).

An Orgy of Commerce:

William Styron's

SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE

RICHARD FOSTER

"It's really curious, you know, . . . this business about evil. . . ."

—Cass Kinsolving

"Sex is the last frontier."—Mason Flagg

The spirit of Hollywood looms and hovers over this absurd book like some Unholy Ghost, giving it its vast Cineramic shape, its hectic vulgar supercoloration, its hollow belting loudness of tone, and its ethos of commercial self-excitation. The bulk of the novel has its setting in Italy, which is now a very popular place for movie-making because of lower production costs and the ready supply of lithe and buxom Italian starlets. Styron has even written in two juicy little Italian starlet roles—one is that of a peasant girl who has stolen a toy from a shop and must listen to the dirty talk of an impotent Italian policeman to pay for her crime; the other, rather meatier (the role, I mean), is of an impoverished peasant girl who steals to get food for her sick father and in the course of her tribulations gets raped twice by the villain, and poses in the nude in a sylvan glade for the hero, who is a painter and married and manfully does not rape her.

As a matter of fact, the whole novel is type cast with beautiful implicitness—another convenience for Hollywood. I've worked out most of the equivalents for myself. How about Silvana Mangano for the twice-raped nude-posing innocent. Perfection! And Gregory Peck, that master of nice-faced vagueness and passivity, for Peter Leverett, the point-of-view narrator, who is just like that. There have been many who could play Mason Flagg (who is a new sort of thing, a tragic villain), the perverted playboy nihilist. But most of them—the young James Mason, Stewart Granger,

et al.—have been Englishmen. Flagg is an American. Nevertheless, I kept imagining him played by Laurence Harvey, who can muster just the needed combination of boyishness and slimy decadence. I vote for Harvey. The hero, Cass Kinsolving, is a little more difficult—perhaps because there is such a plethora of possibility. He would have to have the mannequin-like good looks of a Rock Hudson or William Holden. But he would also have to combine a rough virility with an appearance of intelligence, in the manner of the late Paul Douglas. And finally, he would have to have a large comfortable vocabulary, a compulsive gift of universal gab running from “horseshit” to “being and nothingness,” that would enable him to say words like “anguish” with the proper feeling of anguish. Probably you couldn’t do better than Brando for such a grab-bag of requirements. And he would be top box-office.

Perhaps just here something should be said about the “story.” Mason Flagg, the rich young American decadent, has around him a kind of court—made up of his women, his artistic and Hollywood friends, and a few parasites, two of which are Leverett, an old prep school buddy who learned early to be fascinated by Mason’s glitter, and Cass Kinsolving, the natural and talented but upset American who, with his wife and kids, becomes dependent upon Mason’s charity in Italy and as a result turns into a kind of degraded court jester. There is also Francesca and her sick father, both of whom Cass befriends. Francesca’s being raped by Mason infuriates Cass, who is falling in love with her. (Not that he doesn’t love his wife, too.) After the rape she is brutally and cruelly murdered on the way between the town and her home in the hills. Cass thinks the murderer must be Mason, and resolves to sober up (he is usually drunk) and take steps to kill evil in its very eye. In a wildly funny but totally humorless murder-chase (a little reminiscent of Humbert Humbert’s protracted extermination of Claire Quilty in *Lolita*) that begins under a bed and ends with a fall from a cliff, Cass achieves his purpose. It then becomes known that the village moron, not Mason Flagg, was Francesca’s murderer. But a sentimental Fascist policeman, who makes the murder of Mason look like a suicide, tells Cass to quit feeling guilty and think about the good in himself. This Cass does, goes back to Charleston and settles down with his family to a respectable life as a newspaper cartoonist.

So much for the story. And it should be evident that its

combination of violence and sex—the two are chummily and shudderingly intertwined throughout the novel—would be grand box office, too. There is the double rape, of course, and the two murders, one pleasingly gradual, the other spiced with heady mutilations (scalping, and several other unmentionable perfections). There is a man (Francesca's father) dying of galloping consumption who expires excitingly at last by urinating a vast fountain of blood before a priest. Of the great amount of sexual activity in the novel, some is private and willing, some private and unwilling, some public and willing, and some is in groups with dope. And there are all species of it—heterosexual, homosexual, onanistic, with many interesting subspecies genially considered along the way, such as exposure, both decent and "indecent," coition between a Negro and an ostrich (scrupulously described from Mason's library of pornography), and others. Of course much of this Hollywood would have to handle by words. But here again, as if Styron had anticipated the need, it is upon words rather than images and actions that the novel concentrates—loving verbal reports of the life of the senses. The book is a great stuffed black magpie full of sexy words, ranking from four-letter latrine designations for the genitalia to that wan, semi-legalistic jargon of sexual misfortune common in lady novelists after George Eliot—such as "slyly removing his dressing gown, he tried to take her. . . ." If Jimmy Stewart could pack the movie houses just by saying "panties" and "intercourse" in *Anatomy of a Murder*, imagine the effect of Brando and Mangano and Peck saying "twat" and "breast" and "slyly removing his dressing gown, he tried to take her"!

All around this plenteous horn of violence and sex-awareness there is a piquant Hollywoodian aura of wealth, cleverness, tears, and irony. A kind of total *smartness*. The wealth is everywhere, especially in the size of things associated with Mason Flagg and the movie people on location in Italy—the size of the Flagg family estate, of Mason's cars and parties, of his girl friends' bejewelled satined bosoms (the good girls in this novel have small, moderate, or unremarkable bosoms).

And there is much up-to-the-minute snottiness about this very world of glitter and wealth and size—the carefully cultivated self-irony of our demi-monde where fashionable artists and intellectuals, Hollywoodians, certain popular idols, the pretentious

rich, and the international creepery of fashion once headed by Elsa Maxwell and the Windsors, come together at the nexus of money and boredom. Thus, a smart, amused attitude is rather loudly taken toward the double of a Norman Vincent Peale, called Dr. Irvin Franklin Bell, who has to pay for his place at a party of Hollywoodians by listening uneasily to a Negro jazzman sing dirty songs at the piano. We briefly meet "an editor of *The Hudson Review*," whose chief characteristics are languor and a blank snobbery about coming from the right Eastern colleges; he irritates Leverett very much. And there is a familiarish person named Harvey Glanser, who just after the war wrote plays "with great courage, insight, and pity," and then sank into "a knotty kind of prose—articles mainly for the small quarterlies—in which he hymned and extolled the then burgeoning signs of juvenile delinquency, psychopaths, rapists, pimps, dope addicts and other maladjusted wretches until, finally descending into a sort of semicoherent pornography, he became unreadable. . . ." If we have the feeling we know who this is, we share with Styron the sense of being fashionably "in."

Of course, all of this smart gossipiness is sweetened with an unswerving compensatory dedication to the beauties of nature and a lachrymose affection for children, rural types, mental defectives, the respectable poor, and young lovers in one another's arms. This is the ichor-of-schmaltz, the spiritual money by which the sharpie offers to pay his way into salvation. It is the kind of feelingness, which in the midst of all the Hollywood corruption and cuteness, serves to separate the good guys from the bad guys. The good guys may be in the Hollywood aura—they may even wallow a little—but it is supposed to be evident that they are not of it. But unfortunately this is also one of the chief ways by which Hollywood's movies separate the bad guys from the good guys—which muddies the matter a little.

"These are miserable times. . . . Read Carlyle. Read Gibbon," cries the old father of Peter Leverett, the narrator. He knows a bad world when he sees one, because he is a reader. Yes, books as well as Hollywood have had a hand in forming this novel. And the elder Leverett should know, because he is right out of several books himself. He is wise, outspoken, warm, and sentimentally cranky—a combination of Gant, an aging Gavin Stevens, and Poppa David. Let him be played by Walter Brennan. And

his Gibbon and Carlyle are a nice allusive counterbalance alternating to the talk of being and nothingness and positive thinking that crowds forward toward the end.

But more important to this novel than thinkers are other novelists. They, with Hollywood—or perhaps they were *transmogrified* by the Hollywood sensibility—also help to create *Set This House on Fire*, its structure, sometimes its tone and style, even on occasion its quality of understanding and perception. Styron's book is a bundle of apparent influences, at least of noticeable resemblances to some of the major novelists we learned at college were the right modern reading. (And that there is no visible Hemingway in this novel, the sort of novel where he might comfortably be expected, is a kind of reverse confirmation of its derivativeness; Hemingway has been rather out of fashion since the end of World War II.) I note major reflections of Conrad, Fitzgerald, and (perhaps surprisingly) Salinger, and a touch here and there of Faulkner and Lawrence.

Styron's first novel shone with the lurid light of the Faulknerian vision, and that vision was generated mainly by the mannered intensities of the Faulknerian rhetoric. There are only touches of Faulkner in *Set This House on Fire*—the narrator's father as a type, perhaps, and the rather literary Old South values he stands for; a grotesque or two, with their attached anecdotes of compulsion and violence; and an occasional cast of rhetoric ("skeletal, attenuated, crypto-humans whose knobby outlines and strange, sudden concavities seemed to express the very essence of exacerbated and outraged flesh. . ."). And in Luigi, the Fascist policeman who covers for Cass at the end of the novel, there is a touch of Lawrence, mixed with Dr. Irvin Franklin Bell, in his message to Cass to dismiss guilt and embrace Life.

The most obvious influences, however, are those of Conrad and Fitzgerald—Conrad the *ur*-influence, Fitzgerald the more specific and immediate. *Set This House on Fire* has the Conradian discontinuous structuring that expresses the subtle tension between moral uncertainty and moral earnestness. There is the elaborate pattern of backward and forward time-shifts following the quest of the seeking conscience (first Leverett's, then Cass's). And there is the co-ordinate filtration of actuality through more than one perspective ("These things you've told me," Cass says to Leverett on page 247, a little less than half way through the

whole corpus of their narrative exchanges, "they've made me mighty glad we've thrashed this out after all. You've lightened some dark spots") in order to convey the ambiguity of the human and moral realities under scrutiny. But in Styron's novel we have only pseudo-moral issues—the sentimental clothing draped around the crass sensationalism—and the Conradisms of structure and logistics become no more than mechanical techniques of delay and mystification in the revelation of simple "facts." So Conrad presides in this novel merely as a technician—machinery without a work to do.

Leverett, of course, is far more like a Fitzgerald than a Conrad narrator—more like a Nick Carraway than a Marlow. What Fitzgerald supplies to Styron is a taste for wealth, classiness, and fast living. But the Fitzgeraldian mystique of all that, the mystique that is made to grow from it, is beyond Styron, and what remains is a mindless fixation. Leverett's blankly intent interest in Mason Flagg's life and death is like a gross parody of Carraway's interest in Gatsby. Carraway sniffed a soul in Gatsby's seemingly soulless world, and he followed it humanely toward its tragedy, learning morally along the way. There is a human heroism in Gatsby, and a pained obsessive humanity in Carraway's compassionate vision of him. But Styron fails to make Leverett anything more than a leech, uncleanly living his own unlivable emotional life on Mason's nerves. Leverett has the instincts of the voyeur—he wants hotly to see everything, and what he can't see he craves to have described to him. When we don't feel him as absolutely unsavory, we at least feel him as unreal. His memory is unusually poor; he must "reconstruct" everything. "I recall," he says at one point, recalling a blue-lighted New York party where marijuana was passed out at the door and Mason's date began playfully zipping his fly up and down, "I recall wondering at the tone of this gathering. . . ." Though his eyes are always open, he sees nothing; no one experience ever teaches him anything about another. He must always be puzzled and wondering, of course, because any more intelligent response would stop the novel in its tracks.

Leverett is like a character in a comic strip who goes around with a perpetual balloon full of question marks riding white and blank over his head. Or like the omnipresent eye of the movie camera staring with brainless lust upon its object. (Once Leverett

actually thinks about himself in the jargon of the movie lot: "And then it was all over. The *scene dissolved* before me. . . ."—My italics.) What he is contemplating most of the time is Mason Flagg, as Carraway is contemplating Gatsby. But Gatsby is a type of the human condition—aspiration confounded by internal *misvision* and external *disvalue*, by mistake and misplaced love. There is the beauty of innocence in Gatsby's stupidity, the stature of heroism in his stolidity. Almost. For there is also humor around Carraway's Gatsby—the humor of his almost religious solemnity in his almost absurd circumstances. But there is no humanizing humor in the portrait of Mason Flagg. Though very pretty, he is three times the monster of Nabokov's Humbert Humbert—proto-Fascist, multiple pervert, would-be genocidist, and all-around creep—and yet Cass and Leverett, though they express some technical moral outrage from time to time, end always with their faces set in the moony drool of the fan mag enthusiast. Drools Cass, Mason's murderer, after a couple of hundred pages of sophomoric self-exploration, to the attentive, gaping Leverett: "All the time I spent with Mason, I felt I never knew him, never could put my hands on him. He was like a gorgeous silver fish in a still pond: make a grab for him, and he slithered away, and there you are with a handful of water. But maybe that was just the thing about him, you see? He was like mercury. Smoke. Wind." Wind indeed. Poor, poor Fitzgerald!

It is not as certain, perhaps, but it seems to me that as Fitzgerald supplied the models for Leverett and Flagg, Salinger has supplied the type for Cass Kinsolving. Cass's painful neuroticism, his great talent for profanity and scurrility, his crude physicality and bottomless compassion—all these make him look rather like Holden Caulfield grown up. Or older, anyway, if not grown up. He has lots of Salinger traits—the endearing traits of the oaf-saint. He loves the Italian peasant girl, Francesca, not because she is played by Silvana Mangano, but because she is so flowerlike in her innocence. He loves the dying Michele, her father, and becomes the physician of his body and his spirit, because he loves humanity and is full of the sentimental guilt himself of being human. He has lots of the casual traits of the Salinger hero, as well: he is adept at the spontaneous whopper; he expresses, though he allows himself to become a parasite on Mason Flagg's wealth, a Caulfieldian distaste for "phonies"; he

says "Old Mason" with the contemplative inflection of Holden's "Old Sally" or "Old Antolini." But most striking of all—and like the later Salinger heroes, those on the verge of divine madness—he has the gift of vision. He has lots of visions, and they are set off against his nightmares as the *other* reality. Here is part of a characteristic one that he reports to Leverett:

. . . Young married people of whatever age and time, other young kids I have never known nor would ever know. Before the babies come. Pretty young wives named Cathy or Mary or Barbara, and guys named Tim or Al or Dave, all of them in these sort of cheerless little apartments all over America—and the percolator boiling, and a rainy Sunday morning, and the guy in his underdrawers and the girl in curlers, feeding the goldfish. Or the two of them nibbling each other's ears and then going back to bed. . . . Why I had this vision I don't know—it was a very sorry vision in many ways. (447)

Yes. And it would probably make the *real* Salinger heroes, as they themselves might put it, "puke." But it is representative of the flavor of Cass Kinsolving's mind.

That eminent Salinger value, the quality (however better it might be named) that stands at the center of his humanism and constitutes the moral and spiritual core of his fiction, *sincerity*, is precisely what is lacking in Styron's novel. If you feel that in any important way Lawrence was right in speaking of literature as "divine service," then you have to feel, I think, that a novel like *Set This House on Fire*, especially tricked out as it is with its epigraphs from John Donne and Theodore Roethke, its quotations from Sophocles and Shakespeare, and its talk about the tragic view of life, is a clear sacrilege. The vacancy at the heart of the book, the absence of the instinctive integrity of mind and feeling that makes a great or good writer, is compensated for by sheer will.

As simple "story," *Set This House on Fire* is stretched, stuffed, padded in a variety of willed mechanical ways to give it the apparent scope and poundage of a "great" novel. There are numerous, often quite gratuitous descriptions of landscape and seascape in various moods and weathers; landscape is a *thing* in this book, as it is to the wide-screen Technicolor camera and the university student of elementary composition. There is an almost incredible amount of story-telling—anecdotes, childhood memories,

dreams—most of it, too, gratuitous. Cass is a great dreamer of dreams—elaborate, self-explaining, symbolic dreams—and he tells them all at tedious length; but others, Leverett, for example, dream and tell, too. And Cass is a great reminiscer, probably one of the most loquacious in all fiction, though Leverett runs him a good second. In fact the dialectical basis of the book is the compendious exchange of narratives and reflections between Leverett and Cass, all of them vaguely related to the questions: What was Mason? What made him tick? What makes us tick, furthermore? Especially, what made us tick when he ticked?

The paralysis of these characters' understanding of Mason is thorough, steady, and much dwelt upon. And as if Styron himself gets a glimmering of the fact that Mason is both a freak and a bore, he makes his characters engage in continual, limp self-questioning of their relationships to Mason. Leverett, puzzling it out with Cass, says dreamily: "Yet he was great fun to be with sometimes. He was entertaining as hell. But he was more than an entertainer. Remove all the other stuff and he might have been quite a guy." *What more?* Well, a few pages later Leverett assures us there was no homosexual attraction; it was something else: "I think I simply felt when I was near him that he was more imaginative, more intelligent than I" [a not improbable possibility], "and at the same time more corrupt. . . ." "Christ," says Cass, who has suffered Mason's violent pre-emption of Francesca, and more, "I'm trying to be fair to this guy! . . . He was bright, too, bright as hell—a marvel even, in his amateur way. What made him such a swine?" And Mason Flagg's wife Celia, a "lovely," small-breasted girl who is cracking up because Mason hasn't slept with her for a year, is nevertheless passionately devoted to him because, as she tells Leverett on an occasion when she has been beaten up by Mason, "he was funny, . . . because he made her laugh, because he had taught her so much. And not the least—would you believe it?—because he was so good-looking!" There is just too much marveling on everybody's part about how Mason's effect transcends his qualities for us not to lose faith both in him and the marvellers.

There is too much talk generally—too many words about nothing. This is the desperate attempt of Styron and his characters to fill the void in themselves and their world. The biggest hullabaloo of all is made, of course, by Cass Kinsolving, the hero of the book. We see him barge around, a funny astonishing drunk,

breaking up a hotel, a PX, his own home; we listen to his vivid, slangy talk; we frequently watch him watching the big humanitarian tears roll down his own fleshy cheeks; and he comes from the South and is a moderate on the Negro question. We know that Styron wants us to take him as a good—a *very* good fellow: a living combination of Job, St. Francis and Natty Bumppo. But even though we know this, he emerges as something else: as a loud-mouth egotistical fake, and an impossible modern-style bore. For at the drop of a hat he will give off the gassiest sort of pedantic blabber:

Ah my God, how can I describe it! It wasn't just the *scene*, you see—it was the sense, the bleeding *essence* of the thing. It was as if I had been given for an instant the capacity to understand not just the beauty itself by its outward signs, but the other—the *eloseness* of beauty, this continuity of beauty in the scheme of all life which triumphs even to the point of taking in sordidness and shabbiness and ugliness, which goes on and on and on. . . .
(257)

When his perky, rattle-brained, innocent little wife, Poppy (played by Marie Wilson), asks him, "Why, Cass? Oh *why* are you so anti-U.S.A.?" she gets several paragraphs of stuff, part of which goes:

. . . Whenever I think of stateside I can't picture nothing else but a side street in Poughkeepsie, New York, where I got lost one night when I came to see you, and whenever I think of it I get consumed with such despair over its sheer ugliness that I feel great waves of anguish rolling over me, and I want to cry. . . .
(283)

He is, as Poppy says, overtly anti-U.S.A. But covertly, as his journal shows, he is just a big, soft, American Southern kid full of regional corn from the movies with the Hall Johnson choir singing in the background:

. . . Though say even somebody like Poppy dont know it there are times when just the thought of one single pine tree at home, in the sand, & a negro church in a grove I knew as a boy & the sunlight coming down hot on a Sunday long ago & the sound of the negroes singing In Bright Mansions Above (?)—then I feel or know rather that all I would need is that one trembling

word to be whispered or spoken into my ear. AMERICA. And I could hold myself back no longer and blubber like a baby. (363-4)

And he is just as monstrously corny as this even in his ostensible self-satire, which always turns into misty-eyed, self-admiring whimsy: "No bullshit, Pete," he sings out after he has killed Flagg, reeling about in front of Leverett with wine and the Tragic Idea on his brain, "I've got a lust to be gone from this place. Make me up a nice potion, see? Make it up out of all these bitter-tasting, deadly things and pour it down my gullet. Ole Cass has had a hard day. He's had a hard day. He's gone the full stretch and his head aches and his legs are weary, and there's no more weeping in him."

Cass's dreadful style is the style of his mind, and as Cass is the ultimate focus of the book's thematic concerns, it is the ultimate style of the book. It is the style, in all of its variations, of an appallingly vulgar, morally and intellectually null, sentimentality. And sentimentality is the stuff you fill a void with—the mechanical puppetry of imitation feelings cavorting on the empty stage of the mind. Sentimentality is the best you can achieve when will is your only power. And since the forms the sentimentality of *Set This House on Fire* take have the vivid stamp of commercial viability on them, we have the right to suspect the well-meaning even of that will.

Styron wrote an imitative but talented first novel that nevertheless received, in my opinion, considerably more notice and acclaim—including a Prix de Rome—than it deserved. Mr. Styron also wrote a long short story about military life, called "The Long March," that had genuine pathos and humor. Though it was surely not a work of major significance, it has been immortalized as one of the volumes in the Modern Library. Now, ten years after *Lie Down in Darkness*, comes *Set This House on Fire*—ostentatiously paraded forth both by Mr. Styron and his publishers as a great book—the fulfillment in maturity, as Granville Hicks claimed in *The Saturday Review*, of the youthful "promise" of ten years ago. The book is nothing of the sort: it is an orgy of commerce pure and simple. There is nothing good about it. Nothing true. But it has immense interest, even so, as a symptom and a symbol and an implicit imperative. In this age of

the pre-fabbed or artificially inflated literary reputation we must be willing to throw a writer like Mr. Styron back into the hopper of anonymity and make him at last prove his claim to the amount of attention he has had from us undeserved. And we must do this not only in the interest of the writer's soul, but in the interest of our own as well.

UNIVERSITY of MINNESOTA

Two Bibliographies: Saul Bellow

William Styron

HAROLD W. SCHNEIDER

The task of the bibliographer is two-fold: to search out all relevant information on his subject, and to select, arrange, comment on, and, in some instances, discard what he has found. In this bibliography I have emphasized fullness—both in listing all relevant pieces and in annotating the more important. Listing nearly all seemed justifiable because as yet the amount is not overwhelming, and the reader interested in these authors' works may possibly be more grateful for completeness than for a narrow selectivity. Annotating generously seemed to make the bibliography not only more useful but also more entertaining. To guide the reader through the list of reviews, however, I have starred (*) those which seemed to me most important or interesting, or which had something different to say; in the other sections of the bibliography, I hope my annotations may prove a sufficient guide.

A word about the arrangement of material: both bibliographies list (1) books, (2) short fiction, (3) articles (for Mr. Bellow, this section becomes two: *Reviews and Articles*), (4) biographical material, and (5) criticism of the author's works. To help the reader, I have used abbreviations sparingly: NYTBR for *New York Times Book Review* (or NYT for the daily paper), NYHTBR for *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* (or NYHT), SRL for *Saturday Review of Literature*, and TLS for *Times Literary Supplement*.

Finally, I am grateful for the aid given me by the librarians consulted at the Walter Library of the University of Minnesota; to my wife, who assisted in the preparation of this bibliography; and to the authors themselves for their suggestions and comment.

Saul Bellow

I. BOOKS

Dangling Man. New York: Vanguard, 1944. London: John Lehmann, 1946. New York: Meridian Books, 1960.

Reviews:

Chamberlain, John, *NYT*, March 25, 1944, p. 13.

De Vries, Peter, *Chicago Sun Bookweek*, April 9, 1944, p. 3.

The novel's purpose "is perfectly realized"; its author has "a fine sense . . . of the intricacies of human relationships."

Fearing, Kenneth, *NYTBR*, March 26, 1944, pp. 5, 15.

Hale, Lionel, *Observer*, January 12, 1947, p. 3. First of five revs.

Heppenstall, Rayner, *New Statesman and Nation*, N.S. 42 (December 28, 1946), pp. 488-489. (Rev. with three other novels.) Notices Bellow's comic talent and praises one scene as being "one of the funniest chapters I have read in years."

Kirkus, 12 (February 1, 1944), p. 48.

Kristol, Irving, *Politics*, 1 (June, 1944), p. 156.

Kupferberg, Herbert, *NYHTBR*, April 9, 1944, p. 11. Likes the careful writing but finds the hero "a spineless young man."

Mayberry, George, *New Republic*, 110 (April 3, 1944), pp. 473-474.

*O'Brien, Kate, *Spectator*, January 3, 1947, p. 26. Fairly extended rev., with two other novels. Praises "this new author" for "taking imaginative fiction" back to "its true origin, the isolated heart, the questioning, separate human soul."

Rothman, N. L., *SRL*, 27 (April 15, 1944), p. 27.

Straus, Ralph, *Sunday Times* (London), January 26, 1947, p. 3.

A brief rev., with four other novels.

Time, 43 (May 8, 1944), p. 104. Faint praise in comment that it is "a very carefully written book"—withdrawn by the statement that the story would gain more sympathy if Bellow realized that "his hero is a pharisaical stinker."

*Trilling, Diana, *Nation*, 158 (April 15, 1944), p. 455. Dislikes the smallness of the novel: "I demand of pessimism, more than of affirmation, that it have a certain grandeur."

Wilson, Edmund, *The New Yorker*, 20 (April 1, 1944), pp. 78, 81. As usual, a perceptive piece of criticism: "The book is an excellent document on the experience of the non-combatant in time of war." Wilson dislikes the "dismalness of the Chicago background"(!) but finds the novel "one of the most honest pieces of testimony on the psychology of a whole generation who have grown up during the depression and the war."

The Victim. New York: Vanguard, 1947. Toronto: Macmillan, 1947.
London: John Lehmann, 1948. New York: Viking
Compass, 1956.

Reviews:

Cross, Jesse E., *Library Journal*, 72 (November 15, 1947), p. 1610.

Downer, A. S. *NYTBR*, November 30, 1947, p. 29. A dissenter:
The novel is "over-contrived and under-contrived," for it is
not clear what the contrivance is about.

*Farrelly, John, *New Republic*, 117 (December 8, 1947), pp. 27-
28. A serious rev., which would award Bellow a place
among the best contemporary writers.

Hale, Lionel, *Observer*, June 13, 1948, p. 3. Short rev., with
four others. *Victim* compared specifically to Jo Sinclair's
Wasteland.

Kirkus, 15 (November 1, 1947), p. 604.

Match, Richard, *NYHTBR*, November 23, 1947, p. 10.

Millar, Ruby, *New English Review*, 15 (July, 1948), p. 89.
Short but very favorable rev.: "It is an individual and
penetrating book which holds the attention"; "Saul Bellow
seems to me the most individual and promising of recent
American novelists."

The New Yorker, 23 (December 13, 1947), p. 139. Brief.

Poore, Charles, *NYT*, November 22, 1947, p. 13.

Smith, R. D., *Spectator*, June 4, 1948, pp. 686, 688. Short rev.;
most of space given to G. Greene's *Heart of the Matter*.

Straus, Ralph, *Sunday Times* (London), June 6, 1948, p. 3.
One of four revs. Book has the "oddest little story" that
does, however, hold one's interest.

Time, 50 (December 1, 1947), pp. 111-112. A rising sympathy:
Although the novel has "a disastrously out-of-key final
chapter," it "has troubling depths of meaning which
make it unusual among new novels."

*Trilling, Diana, *Nation*, 166 (January 3, 1948), pp. 24-25.
The chill inspired by the earlier novel has worn off: This
work is not only better, "but also hard to match, in recent
fiction, for brilliance, skill, and originality." The book
"can be read on so many levels" that one puts "false
boundaries" on it by discussing only one; it is "morally one
of the farthest-reaching books our contemporary culture
has produced," and is "solidly built of fine, important
ideas."—A great thaw and a fine appreciation.

Gibbs, Wolcott, *The New Yorker*, 28 (May 10, 1952), p. 54.
Review of a dramatization by Leonard Lesley of Bellow's
The Victim.

The Adventures of Augie March. New York: Viking Press, 1953.

Toronto: Macmillan, 1953. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954. New York: Popular Library, 1955. Cologne, Germany: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1956. New York: Viking Compass, 1960.

Reviews:

- American Scholar*, 23 (Winter, 1953-54), p. 126. Brief par.
Amis, Kingsley, *Spectator*, May 21, 1954, p. 626. Rev. with three other novels. "There can be few important novels which are also entertainments, but this is one."
Booklist, 50 (September 1, 1953), p. 1.
Cassidy, T. E., *Commonweal*, 58 (October 2, 1953), p. 636.
Crane, Milton, *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, September 20, 1953, p. 4.
*Davis, Robert Gorham, *NYTBR*, September 20, 1953, pp. 1, 36. (Port.) A long and favorable review, which praises particularly the first-person narrator, "an ideal observer and a very typical one."
*Geismar, Maxwell, *Nation*, 177 (November 14, 1953), p. 404. "It is a good book, but not a great book."
Hicks, Granville, *New Leader*, September 21, 1953, pp. 23-24. Combined rev. with Wright Morris's *The Deep Sleep*.
Hopkinson, Tom, *The London Magazine*, I (June, 1954), 82, 84, 86. Strongly enthusiastic, but interesting for its list of the "faults": (1) the heroines "do not come off"; (2) the attempt to put the hero's philosophical speculations into a vivid language leads to wordiness and badly knit passages; and (3) not every link in the adventures comes off.
Hughes, Riley, *Catholic World*, 178 (December, 1953), pp. 233-234.
Kirkus, 21 (July 1, 1953), p. 395.
Kristol, Irving, *Encounter*, 3 (July, 1954), pp. 74-75. Generous in praise, especially for Bellow's comic talent: "the book's humour is as tense as a piano wire, finely tuned, all discord banished. Perhaps this is how the gods see us when they look down."
*Mizener, Arthur, *NYHTBR*, September 20, 1953, p. 2 (Port.) "This is a big book, not only physically, but in purpose, by a writer of talent."
Newsweek, 42 (September 21, 1953), pp. 102, 104.
Pickrel, Paul, *The Yale Review*, n. s. 43 (Autumn, 1953), p. x.
Prescott, Orville, *NYT*, September 18, 1953, p. 21.
*Priestley, J. B., *Sunday Times* (London), May 9, 1954, p. 5. A single, long rev. that has much praise for the novel: "for once the fuss is about something, and the swan is not a goose." "Of its kind—the epic-picaresque-comic—the novel is a very good specimen indeed, the best new example of the form I have read in years." Mr. Priestley delights in

the force of the book, given it by "the unflagging and astounding zest of Mr. Bellow's narrative" and says the book is "a tour de force, a triumph, a feast."

- *Pritchett, V. S., *New Statesman and Nation*, N. S. 47 (June 19, 1954), p. 803. A long rev.—with Christopher Isherwood's *The World in the Evening*. Praises prose as appropriate for Bellow's picaresque novel but criticizes it as "a rhetoric—and sometimes no more than the rhetoric of the catalogue." Finds that besides Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*, *Augie March* "thickens into reminiscence," but that no English writer can communicate such excitement as Bellow does about his native city.
- Rolo, Charles J., *Atlantic*, 192 (October, 1953), pp. 86, 87. Sees it as "a notable achievement," but says Bellow does not take us inside *Augie* as Stendhal did with *Julien Sorel*.
- Rosenberg, Dorothy, *San Francisco Sunday Chronicle*, October 25, 1953, p. 18.
- Time*, 62 (September 21, 1953), pp. 114, 117. (Port., p. 117.)
- TLS*, June 4, 1954, p. 357. First part of rev. of four novels. Praises book for the "colloquial, complex, powerful writing," and says there is "no doubt about ability" but some "obscurity about Bellow's intentions." Work is to be compared to *USA* and to Studs Lonigan trilogy; "with all its limitations this is the work of a considerable talent working on a major scale."
- Walbridge, Earle F., *Library Journal*, 78 (September 15, 1953), pp. 1529-1530.
- *Warren, Robert Penn, "Man with no Commitments," *New Republic*, 129 (November 2, 1953), pp. 22-23. Longest and most important of the revs. Examines the "Flaubert-James tradition" of Bellow's two earlier novels, and says that Bellow has scored a "triumph in the apparent formlessness of the autobiographical-picaresque novel"—"from now on any discussion of fiction in America in our time will have to take account of it." High praise, but a listing of flaws also.
- *Webster, Harvey Curtis, *SRL*, 36 (September 19, 1953), pp. 13-14. (Cover photograph, biog. note) Says reading *Augie* in 1953 is like reading *Ulysses* in 1920: the books are not alike, but make "an apparently complete break with both past technique and past subject matter." Bellow's novel is certainly "an achievement in and a promise of the development of a novelist who deserves comparison only with the best, even at this early stage of his development."
- *West, Anthony, *The New Yorker*, 29 (September 26, 1953), pp. 140, 142, 145. Most unsympathetic and derogatory of the reviews. West says Bellow has loaded his book with

"Melvillean symbol" [see Bellow's later article on symbol-hunters] and Jamesian allegory. "All this is supposed to be much more serious and laudable than precision about the experience and the living being of Augie March, but the truth is that it is only a great deal duller."

Wilson, Angus, *Observer*, May 9, 1954, p. 9. First of three revs.; largely favorable. Notes Bellow's return to the picaresque (like the young English writers) and suggests that the novel may have to go back to its origins to grow up again.

Seize the Day. New York: Viking Press, 1956. Toronto: Macmillan, 1956. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1957. Turin, Italy: Einandi, 1958. Cologne, Germany: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1958. New York: Popular Library, 1958. A French edition will appear soon.
Contents: "Seize the Day"; "A Father-to-Be"; "Looking for Mr. Green"; "The Gonzaga Manuscripts"; "The Wrecker (a one-act play)."

Reviews:

Allen, Walter, *New Statesman and Nation*, N. S. 53 (April 27, 1957), p. 548. (Rev. with three other novels). Similar to *Augie March* in "acceptance of the contemporary world." Praises Bellow's "energy and firmness . . . and his astonishing eye for externals."

Alpert, Hollis, *SRL*, 39 (November 24, 1956), pp. 18, 34. (Port.) Finds book "brilliantly funny, at times profound, occasionally exasperating."

Bayley, John, *Spectator*, June 7, 1957, p. 758. Brief rev. with four other novels.

Booklist, 53 (December 1, 1956), p. 174.

Crane, Milton, *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, December 30, 1956, p. 7.

Fiedler, Leslie, *The Reporter*, 15 (December 13, 1956), p. 46. Short rev.

*Gill, Brendan, *The New Yorker*, 32 (January 5, 1957), pp. 69-70. Considers Bellow among the "three or four" most talented writers of the decade.

*Gold, Herbert, "The Discovered Self," *Nation*, 183 (November 17, 1956), pp. 435-436. The title story is "a great one" and "I suspect that it is one of the central stories of our day." The book represents "an extension of Bellow's view of contemporary life."

Hicks, Granville, *New Leader*, November 26, 1956, pp. 24-25.

Hogan, William, *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 15, 1956, p. 27.

Hopkinson, Tom, *Observer*, April 21, 1957, p. 11. (First of

four revs.) Finds this work disappointing after *Augie March*.

*Kazin, Alfred, *NYTBR*, November 18, 1956, pp. 5, 36. One of those who regard the title story as "the most moving piece of fiction this young author has as yet written." Says Bellow shows that the real suffering of the world is "always the suffering of not understanding."

Lynch, John A., "Prelude to Accomplishment," *Commonweal*, 65 (November 30, 1956), pp. 238-239. Book is "a fill-in," just "an interim report."

Pickrel, Paul, *Harper's*, 213 (December, 1956), p. 100.

Rolo, Charles J., *Atlantic*, 199 (January, 1957), pp. 86-87.

*Rugoff, Milton, *NYTBR*, November 18, 1956, p. 3. Considers it "vintage Bellow, not of the best year, but of a good one."

*Schwartz, Edward, "Chronicles of the City," *New Republic*, 135 (December 3, 1956), pp. 20-21. Sees Bellow like Joyce in being able to portray vividly the city's life. "Bellow seems more suited by temperament and ability than any writer of his generation to create for America 'the uncreated conscience' of modern man."

Smith, T. Francis, *Library Journal*, 81 (November 1, 1956), p. 2584.

*Swados, Harvey, *New York Post Week-End Magazine*, November 18, 1956, p. 11. *Seize the Day* is "absolutely masterful, . . . funny and profoundly moving."

Swan, Michael, *Sunday Times* (London), April 21, 1957, p. 7. Praises the brilliantly drawn characters and the novel as a whole. "Mr. Bellow is an artist, and his novel is a work of art."

Time, 68 (November 19, 1956), p. 122.

"Upper West Side," *Newsweek*, 48 (November 19, 1956), pp. 142-143.

West, Ray. B., Jr., "Six Authors in Search of a Hero," *Sewanee Review*, 64 (Summer, 1957), pp. 498-508. Pp. 505-506 contain a rev. of *Seize the Day*.

Wyndham, Francis, *The London Magazine*, 4 (August, 1957), p. 66. Paragraph rev.

Henderson the Rain King. New York: Viking Press, 1959. Toronto: Macmillan, 1959. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1959. New York: Signet, 1960. German and French editions will appear soon.

Reviews:

Atlantic, 203 (March, 1959), p. 88. Cool: an "attempted tour tour de force which has failed to come off"; the novel reads like a parody of the middlebrow quest for self-realization.

- *Baker, Carlos, *NYTBR*, February 22, 1959, pp. 4-5. Like Herbert Gold, Mr. Baker points out that fantasy has seized hold of Bellow's imagination. "The question is whether the fantastic vehicle in which he now rides is the most sensible form of conveyance for Mr. Bellow's inside purpose."
- Booklist*, 55 (December 15, 1958), p. 202. Advance notice.
- Curley, T. F., *Commonweal*, 70 (April 17, 1959), p. 84. Praises Bellow's comedy: "The book is not remarkable for funny lines or even scenes; rather the entire concept is hilarious."
- *Gold, Herbert, *Nation*, 188 (February 21, 1959), pp. 169, 170, 171, 172. A long and important rev. Gold warns the reader to be ready for "playful fantasy" rather than "realistic fiction or symbolic construct."
- *Hicks, Granville, *SRL*, 42 (February 21, 1959), p. 20. (Cover port.) Praise for Bellow and chastisement for the earlier reviewer who dreamed up symbolism for *Augie* and then scolded Bellow for it.
- Hogan, William, *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 23, 1959, p. 25.
- *Jacobson, Dan, "The Solitariness of Saul Bellow," *Spectator*, May 22, 1959, p. 735. A long and enthusiastic review, which nevertheless maintains that Bellow has not yet "come to terms with the true nature of his talent or genius."
- Kirkus*, 27 (January 1, 1959), p. 16.
- Kogan, Herman, *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, February 22, 1959, p. 3.
- Maddocks, Melvin, *Christian Science Monitor*, February 26, 1959, p. 11. "As a novelist, Mr. Bellow moves in lunges and plunges, a bit like his hero."
- Malcolm, Donald, *The New Yorker*, 35 (March 14, 1959), pp. 171, 172, 173. Novel not a success, for the hero is "too stupid for the task imposed on him"; "Henderson never betrays the slightest symptom of knowing what he is talking about."
- Miller, Karl, "Poet's Novels," *Listener*, 61, pp. 1099-1100. Brief mention of *Henderson*; most space devoted to Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* and to Lawrence Durrell.
- Pickrel, Paul, *Harper's*, 218 (March, 1959), p. 104. Better than *Augie March*; "a literary event."
- *Podhoretz, Norman, *NYHTBR*, February 22, 1959, p. 3. (Port.) Finds the novel "curiously unsatisfying" but of "high literary distinction" anyway; in fact, it is the "most brilliantly written novel to have come along in years" and confirms Bellow's "position as the great master of narrative prose in this period." The novel's weakness is in the "reliance on abstract metaphysical categories," and the

resolution at the end (i.e., Henderson's reconciling himself to reality) is unconvincing.

Prescott, Orville, *NYT*, February 23, 1959, p. 21.

*Price, Martin, *The Yale Review*, n.s. 48 (March, 1959), pp. 453-456. Enthusiastic praise. Henderson is "an American Adam."

Scott, J. D., *Sunday Times* (London), May 24, 1959, p. 15. A skimpy rev., one of five.

*Swados, Harvey, "Bellow's Adventures in Africa," *New Leader*, March 23, 1959, pp. 23-24. Ranks himself among "most ardent of pro-Bellow contingent": "I simply want to affirm that Bellow is . . . the most significantly exciting novelist now at work in the United States."

Tanasoca, Donald, *Library Journal*, 84 (January, 1959), p. 118.

Time, 73 (February 23, 1959), p. 102. Not favorable: "Henderson's moral dilemma is more real than Henderson." And "at times Henderson is too greyly overcast with thought to be more than a dun Quixote."

*TLS, June 12, 1959, p. 352. Judicious.

Wain, John, *Observer*, May 24, 1959, p. 21. "It is not a great book, but it is a moving and true one."

*Waterhouse, Keith, *New Statesman and Nation*, N. S. 57 (June 6, 1959), pp. 805-806. Praises Bellow's ability to "take a . . . static text and keep it moving" and the book as Bellow's best so far.

Weales, Gerald, *The Reporter*, 20 (March 19, 1959), pp. 46-47.

*Whittemore, Reed, *New Republic*, 140 (March 16, 1959), pp. 17-18. Compares nine early revs. of *Henderson*, and notes that the book must be read in the light of Bellow's article about symbol-hunting, for it is "clearly constructed for the delight and despair of meaning-hunters." The book, finally, does not succeed, for the artifice is not serious—only the mind behind it is.

Wilson, Angus, "Books of the Year," *The Observer*, December 27, 1959, p. 8. Mentions only *Henderson* as his choice of the "best books," saying, "the only really important book I have read this year" and, despite its faults, "in a different class from the other fiction."

II. SHORT FICTION

1941 "Two Morning Monologues," *Partisan Review*, 8 (May-June, 1941), pp. 230-236. Reprinted in *Partisan Reader* (New York: Dial Press, 1946), pp. 91-96.

1942 "The Mexican General," *Partisan Review*, 9 (May-June, 1942), pp. 178-194. (Said to be Bellow's first published story; it is actually his second.) Reprinted in *More*

- Stories in the Modern Manner* (New York: Avon Publications, Inc., 1954), pp. 235-252.
- 1943 "Notes of a Dangling Man," *Partisan Review*, 10 (September-October, 1943), pp. 402-409, 429-438. Reprinted in *Best American Short Stories, 1944*, Martha Foley, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944), pp. 21-40.
- 1949 "Sermon by Doctor Pep," *Partisan Review*, 16 (May, 1949), pp. 455-462. Reprinted in *Best American Short Stories, 1950*, Martha Foley, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950, pp. 59-66.
Also reprinted in *The New Partisan Reader, 1945-1953* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1953) pp. 99-105.
- And in *Fiction of the Fifties*, Herbert Gold, ed. (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1959), pp. 66-73.
- "Dora," *Harper's Bazaar*, 83 (November, 1949), pp. 118, 188-190, 198-199.
- "From the Life of Augie March," *Partisan Review*, 16 (November, 1949), pp. 1077-1089. Chapter I of *Augie*, with but a few changes in the first paragraphs. The future novel's title is announced as *Life Among the Machiavellians*.
- 1950 "Trip to Galena," *Partisan Review*, 17 (November-December, 1950), pp. 779-794. Listed as preprint from a novel in progress, to be called *Crab and the Butterfly*.
- 1951 "Looking for Mr. Green," *Commentary*, 11 (March, 1951), pp. 251-261. (Collected in *Seize the Day*.)
"By the Rock Wall," *Harper's Bazaar*, 85 (April, 1951), pp. 135, 205, 207-208, 214-216.
"The Coblins," *Sewanee Review*, 59 (Autumn, 1951), pp. 635-653. Chapter II of *Augie*, with but slight changes.
- "The Einhorns," *Partisan Review*, 18 (November-December, 1951), pp. 619-645. Reprinted in *Perspectives USA*, No. 2 (Winter, 1953), pp. 101-129. Chapter V of *Augie*.
- 1952 "Interval in a Lifeboat," *The New Yorker*, 28 (December 27, 1952), pp. 24-28, 33-39. Chapter XXV of *Augie*, omitting first pages about Augie and Stella's wedding, and with numerous differences in the texts.
- 1953 "The Eagle," *Harper's Bazaar*, 87 (February, 1953), pp. 126-127, 196, 203-204, 206. This story, considerably changed and expanded, forms Chapters XV & XVI of *Augie* (principally Chap. XV).
- "Mintouchian," *Hudson Review*, 6 (Summer, 1953), pp. 239-249. Chapter XXIV of *Augie*, with very slight changes.
- 1954 "The Wrecker" [play], *New World Writing*, 6 (1954), pp. 271-287. (Collected in *Seize the Day*.)

- 1955 "A Father-to-be," *The New Yorker*, 30 (February 5, 1955), pp. 26-30. (Collected in *Seize the Day*.)
- 1956 "Seize the Day," *Partisan Review*, 23 (Summer, 1956), pp. 295-319, 376-424, 426-428, 431-432. (This novelette became the title work of the later collection.)
- "The Gonzaga Manuscripts." In *discovery* No. 4, Vance Bourjaily, ed. (New York: Pocket Books, 1956). (Collected in *Seize the Day*.)
- Reprinted in *Prize Stories 1956: The O. Henry Awards* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1956), pp. 76-102.
- 1958 "Henderson the Rain King," *Hudson Review*, 11 (Spring, 1958), pp. 11-28. Chapters I-IV of the novel shortened and somewhat changed.

III. REVIEWS

- "Dreiser and the Triumph of Art," *Commentary*, 11 (May, 1951), pp. 502-503. A rev. of F. O. Matthiessen's *Theodore Dreiser*. Reprinted in *The Stature of Theodore Dreiser: a critical survey of the man and his work*, Alfred Kazin and C. Shapiro, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), pp. 146-148.
- "Gide as Autobiographer," *New Leader*, June 4, 1951, p. 24. Rev. of Andre Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, with "Journal of *The Counterfeiters*" (the latter kept by Gide when writing the novel).
- "Hemingway and the Image of Man," *Partisan Review*, 20 (May-June, 1953), pp. 338-342. Rev. of Philip Young's *Ernest Hemingway*.
- "Italian Fiction: Without Hope," *New Leader*, December 11, 1950, pp. 21-22. A rev. of *The New Italian Writers, An Anthology from Botteghe Oscure*, ed. by Marguerite Caetani.
- "Laughter in the Ghetto," *SRL*, 36 (May 30, 1953), p. 15. Rev. of Sholom Aleichem's *The Adventures of Mottel the Cantor's Son*.
- "A Personal Record," *New Republic*, 130 (February 22, 1954), p. 20. A rev. of Joyce Cary's *Except the Lord*.
- "Pleasure and Pains of Playgoing," *Partisan Review*, 21 (May, 1954), pp. 312-317. Informal revs. of four plays, including Eliot's *Confidential Clerk* and Sartre's *No Exit*.
- "Rabbi's Boy in Edinburgh," *SRL*, 39 (March 24, 1956), p. 19. Rev. of David Daiches' autobiography, *Two Worlds*.
- "The Swamp of Prosperity," *Commentary*, 28 (July, 1959), pp. 77-79. Rev. of Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus*.
- "The Uses of Adversity," *The Reporter*, 21 (October 1, 1959), pp. 42-44. Rev. of Oscar Lewis's *Five Families*.

IV. ARTICLES

- "Address by Gooley MacDowell to the Hasbeens Club of Chicago," *Hudson Review*, 4 (Summer, 1951), pp. 222-227. A persona's self-assessment, humorous and satirical.
- "Deep Readers of the World, Beware!" *NYTBR*, February 15, 1959, pp. 1, 34. Bellow against the symbol-hunters.
- "Distractions of a Fiction Writer." In *New World Writing*, 12 (New York: New American Library, 1957), pp. 229-243. Also in *The Living Novel*, Granville Hicks, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 1-20. The writer speaks about his craft—and art: an important essay.
- "Foreword." To F. M. Dostoevskii, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* [translated by Richard Lee Renfield], (New York: Criterion Books, 1955), pp. 9-27.
- "The French as Dostoevsky Saw Them," *New Republic*, 132 (May 23, 1955), pp. 17-20. Comparison of Bellow's impression of the French with Dostoevsky's in *Le Bourgeois de Paris* (translated as *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*), which Bellow picked up at a book stand. (This essay was written to be printed as the foreword to above translation of Dostoevsky's work.)
- "How I Wrote Augie March's Story," *NYTBR*, January 31, 1954, pp. 3, 17. On writing while abroad.
- "Illinois Journey," *Holiday*, 22 (September, 1959), pp. 62, 102-107. An essay on the writer's "home state."
- "Isaac Rosenfeld," *Partisan Review*, 23 (Fall, 1956), pp. 565-567. A memorial tribute.
- "The Jewish Writer and the English Literary Tradition," *Commentary*, 8 (October, 1949), pp. 366-367. Part of a symposium of answers to the question of the "Jew's" place in English literature. Bellow says that those who have "an idolatry of culture" reject the Jew on the basis of his not being "an aristocrat of culture." "But the answer is obvious: it is impossible for men to be rejected in great literature."
- "The Sealed Treasure," *TLS*, July 1, 1960,, p. 414. (Limits of Control"—VIII.) One of a series of articles by important contemporary novelists writing on their art and the modern world.
- "Spanish Letter," *Partisan Review*, 15 (February, 1948), pp. 217-230. Experiences during a summer in Madrid.
- "A Talk with the Yellow Kid," *The Reporter*, 15 (September 6, 1956), pp. 41-44. Informal sketch and biography of Joe ("the Yellow Kid") Weil, "one of the greatest confidence men of his day." The article celebrates an era and a city (Chicago).

Translation of I. B. Singer's "Gimpel the Fool," *Partisan Review*, 20 (May-June, 1953), pp. 300-313.

Reprinted in *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories*, Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, eds. (New York: Viking Press, 1954), pp. 401-414.

Also reprinted in *Gimpel the Fool and other stories* by Isaac Bashevis Singer (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), pp. 3-21.

"The University as a Villain," *Nation*, 185 (November 16, 1957), pp. 361-363. Bellow says that the writer, not the surroundings, determines what and whether a man will write. Different writers may demand different surroundings, and the university is no more or less an inhibiting influence on a writer than another setting would be. "It's up to the spirit, altogether, and the spirit prints no timetable."

"The Writer and the Audience," *Perspectives USA*, No. 9 (Autumn, 1954), pp. 99-102.

V. BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

Breit, Harvey, "Talk with Saul Bellow," *NYTBR*, September 20, 1953, p. 22. Interesting for biog. information and comment on writing *Augie March*.

....., *Writer Observed* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1956), pp. 271-274.

Davis, Robert G., "Readers and Writers Face to Face," *NYTBR*, November 9, 1958, pp. 4, 40-41. A report on a symposium in which Saul Bellow, Wright Morris, Leslie Fiedler, and Dorothy Parker discussed American writers and their audience.

Hobson, Laura, "Trade Winds," *SRL*, 36 (August 22, 1953), p. 6. Advance report on *Augie March*, interesting as an account of the novel's gestation.

Kalb, Beatrice, "Biographical Sketch," *SRL*, 36 (September 19, 1953), p. 13.

Kunitz, Stanley J., ed., *Twentieth Century Authors*, First Supplement (New York: H. W. Wilson Co. 1955), pp. 77-73. Both the fullest account of Bellow's career and the most interesting for its quotations from Bellow speaking about modern fiction.

NYHTBR, October 11, 1953, p. 18. Short autobiographical sketch.

Warfel, Harry R., ed., *American Novelists of Today* (New York, et al.: American Book Co., 1951), pp. 32-33. Brief biographical sketch.

VI. CRITICISM OF BELLOW'S WORKS

See starred reviews.

Aldridge, John W. "The Society of Three Novels." In *In Search of Heresy* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1956), pp. 126-148. Pp. 131-139 on *The Adventures of Augie March*.

Bergler, Edmund, "Writers of Half-Talent," *American Imago*, 14 (Summer, 1957), pp. 155-164. Examines three novels from a psychoanalytical point of view. Says that the adventures of Augie March are not proper to the passive character described, either as a "psychic masochist" or as a schizoid-masochist "personality."

Cambon, Glauco, "Il nuovo romanzo di Saul Bellow," *Aut Aut* (Milan), No. 53 (September, 1959), pp. 318-320.

Chase, Richard, "The Adventures of Saul Bellow" [subtitled "Progress of a Novelist"], *Commentary*, 27 (April, 1959), pp. 323-330. An excellent critique of Bellow's work, as well as a review of *Henderson*.

Clay, George R., "Jewish Hero in American Fiction," *The Reporter*, 17 (September 19, 1956), pp. 43-46. Brief mention of Bellow and others in rev. of Myron F. Kaufman's *Remember Me to God*.

Cowley, Malcolm. "Naturalism: No Teacup Tragedies." In *The Literary Situation* (New York: Viking Press, 1954), pp. 74-95. Pp. 91-93 on *Augie March*.

Duesberg, Jacques C., "Un jeune romancier américain: Saul Bellow," *Synthesis*, 10 (May-June, 1955), pp. 149-150.

Eisinger, Chester E., "Saul Bellow: Love and Identity," *Accent*, 18 (Summer, 1958), pp. 179-203. A long and perceptive essay on the characters, themes, and world of Bellow's novels.

Fiedler, Leslie A., "Saul Bellow," *Prairie Schooner*, 31 (Summer, 1957), pp. 103-110. An original study, which says that to understand the contemporary novel, we must come to terms with Bellow, for he is the first Jewish-American novelist to stand "at the center of American literature." Because of the "collapse of the proletarian novel" and the urbanization of America, Bellow's "Jewish Huck Finn," *Augie March*, has become "the representative American."

....., "The Breakthrough: The American Jewish Novelist and the Fictional Image of the Jew," *Midstream*, IV, i, 15-35. Pp. 34-35 on Bellow (a shorter version of above article in *Prairie Schooner*).

Frank, Reuben, "Saul Bellow: The Evolution of a Contemporary Novelist," *Western Review*, 18 (Winter, 1954),

- pp. 101-112. An important early piece of criticism, which sees Bellow emerging as the voice of the "Silent Generation" of Americans.
- Freedman, Ralph, "Saul Bellow: The Illusion of Environment," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, I (Winter, 1960), 50-65. An interesting piece which discusses the nature of Bellow's heroes and their relations with their environments.
- Geismar, Maxwell, "Saul Bellow: Novelist of the Intellectuals." In *American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1958), pp. 210-224. A long and important piece, essentially unfavorable to Bellow's stature as a major artist, but which notes "the accuracy of [his] social picture" and his general involvement with his material.
- Glicksberg, Charles I., "The Theme of Alienation in the American Jewish Novel," *Reconstructionist*, 23 (November 29, 1957), pp. 8-13. References to Bellow appear on p. 10.
- Gold, Herbert, "Fiction of the Fifties," *Hudson Review*, 12 (Summer, 1959), pp. 192-201. (Refs. to B.) Also in *Fiction of the Fifties: A Decade of American Writing*, edited and with an introduction by Gold (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1959).
- Hoffman, Frederick J. *The Modern Novel in America*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951, 1956. (Also in Gateway paperback edition.) Pp. 188-189 on Bellow's *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* and Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky*.
- Howe, Irving, "Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction," *Partisan Review*, 26 (Summer, 1959), pp. 420-436. Modern writer has to find new society and new classes. Men like Bellow [brief refs.], Mailer, Gold approach American life obliquely.
- Kazin, Alfred, "The World of Saul Bellow," *The Griffin*, June, 1959, pp. 4-9. A short but provocative essay on Bellow in the course of a rev. of *Henderson* for *The Readers' Subscription*.
-, "The Alone Generation," *Harper's*, 219 (October, 1959), pp. 127-131. Comment on Bellow on p. 129.
- Lehan, Richard, "Existentialism in Recent American Fiction: The Demonic Quest," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, I (Summer, 1959), 181-292. Says that the fiction of Bellow, Ralph Ellison, Paul Bowles, and Richard Wright contains the existential ideas of Sartre and Camus, either through direct influence (Wright

and Bowles) or because of "an affinity of mind or spirit."

Levine, Paul, "Saul Bellow: The Affirmation of the Philosophical Fool," *Perspective*, 10 (Winter, 1959), pp. 163-176.

Lewis, R. W. B. *The American Adam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955. In the Epilogue, pp. 199-200 refer to Bellow, Ralph Ellison, and Salinger.

Lombardo, Agostino. *Realismo e Simbolismo: Saggi di Letteratura Americana Contemporanea*. (Biblioteca di Studi Americani, No. 3.) Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura. On American literature, from Pound and Eliot to Bellow and Herbert Gold.

Praz, Mario, "Impressioni italiane di Americani dell' Ottocento," *Studi Americani*, 4 (1958), pp. 85-108.

Quinton, Anthony, "The Adventures of Saul Bellow," *The London Magazine*, 6 (December, 1959), pp. 55-59. Bellow's heroes search for reality and celebrate human freedom.

Raes, Hugo, "Amerikaanse Literatuur: Saul Bellow," *Vlaamse Gids*, 42 (December, 1958), pp. 283-284. *Seize the Day* is described as typical of Bellow's work in having a hero lost in the modern world. Bellow is one of the most important younger American writers.

Ross, Theodore J., "Notes on Saul Bellow," *Chicago Jewish Forum*, 18, pp. 21-27.

Sanavio, Piero, "Il Romanzo di Saul Bellow," *Studi Americani*, No. 2 (1956), pp. 261-284.

Stevenson, David L., "Fiction's Unfamiliar Face," *Nation*, 187 (November 1, 1958), pp. 307-309. On Bellow, Styron, Herbert Gold, et al. (See entry under Styron.)

"A Vocal Group / The Jewish Part in American Letters," *TLS*, November 6, 1959, p. xxxv. (In the special number called *The American Imagination*.) High praise for Bellow as most notable of a group of Jewish writers adding much to contemporary letters.

Widmer, Kingsley, "Poetic Naturalism in the Contemporary Novel," *Partisan Review*, 26 (Summer, 1959), pp. 467-472. Bellow, Gold, Salinger, and Algren portray mythic heroes who rebel but finally settle back to the ordinary.

William Styron

I. BOOKS

Lie Down in Darkness. Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1951. Toronto: McClelland, 1951. London: Hamilton Hamish, 1952. Paris: Les Editions Mondiales, 1952. Copenhagen:

Westermanns Forlag, 1952. Buenos Aires: Kraft, 1953.
New York: Viking Compass, 1957. Milan: Editore Sugar,
1958. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1959. Frankfurt: Kossodo
Verlag, 1959. New York: Signet, 1960.

Reviews:

- *Aldridge, John W., *NYTBR*, September 9, 1951, p. 5. Book has "brilliant lyric power" with "some of the elements of greatness"; its "story assumes the significance of a penetrating modern allegory."
- Breit, Harvey, *Atlantic*, 188 (October, 1951), pp. 78, 79, 80. Book is "richly and even . . . poetically written." Author has gone to "Joyce for his structure and Faulkner for his rhetoric."
- Byam, M. S., *Library Journal*, 76 (September 15, 1951), pp. 1423-1424.
- Chapin, Ruth, *Christian Science Monitor*, October 4, 1951, p. 15. Double review with Caroline Gordon's *The Strange Children*.
- *Cowley, Malcolm, *New Republic*, 125 (October 8, 1951), p. 125. Compares characters and method to *The Sound and the Fury*. Says "the example of Faulkner seems to have had a liberating effect on Styron's imagination. One might even say that his book is best and most personal when it is most Faulknerian."
- *Davis, Robert Gorham, *American Scholar*, 21 (Winter, 1951-52), pp. 114, 116. "The great interest [of the novel] . . . is a moral one": the characters are moving and the story successful because of Styron's "imaginative grasp of moral realities."
- Derleth, August, *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, September 9, 1951, p. 3.
- Downing, Francis, *Commonweal*, 54 (October 5, 1951), p. 620.
- *Geismar, Maxwell, *SRL*, 34 (September 15, 1951), pp. 12-13. Book is "best novel of the year by my standards," the work of a "genuine fresh talent." It has a completely absorbing story with no "thesis" (compare with rev. by H. M. Jones). The writing is "graceful and delicate" and "rigorously controlled." Novel is "almost too well built."
- Janeway, Elizabeth, "Private Emotions Privately Felt," *New Leader*, January 21, 1952, p. 25. Defends book against charge of being derivative.
- *Jones, Howard Mumford, *NYHTBR*, September 9, 1951, p. 3. Praises "planning," style, and stream of insights; and says novel is "satisfying," though it sticks with the current conventions. Styron is a "craftsman" with the "courage to be a moralist."
- Lambert, J. W., *Sunday Times* (London), March 31, 1952, p. 3.

One of four revs.—brief.

Newsweek, 38 (September 10, 1951), pp. 106-107.

The New Yorker, 27 (September 29, 1951), pp. 106-107.

O'Brien, Alfred, Jr., *Commonweal*, 55 (October 19, 1951), pp. 43-44.

Prescott, Orville, *NYT*, September 10, 1951, p. 19.

Scott, J. D., *New Statesman and Nation*, N. S. 43 (April 19, 1952), p. 473. (Rev. with three other novels.) Says Styron is likely to appeal to the little reviews, for one's "first impression of the book is of something very good indeed," but there is actually little "that is original about Mr. Styron's performance."

*Swados, Harvey, *Nation*, 173 (November 24, 1951), p. 453. Novel shows "a strong and fertile new talent," but is nevertheless "unsatisfactory" because it attempts to invest its "family with a grandiose significance."

Time, 58 (September 10, 1951), pp. 106, 108.

Wallace, M., "Of a Nobel Laureate and Other Novelists," *"Independent Woman [now National Business Woman]*, 30 (November, 1951), p. 325. Says Styron, like Thomas Mann in *Buddenbrooks*, has produced a remarkable first novel which may portend greatness.

The Long March. New York: Random House Modern Library (paperback only), 1956. (Also see title entry under short stories.)

No reviews. See criticism of Styron's works by Geismar (Section V).

Set This House on Fire. New York: Random House, 1960. Toronto: Random House, 1960. The novel will appear in England (Hamilton Hamish), France (Gallimard), Germany (Fischer), Italy (Sinandi), Argentina (Sudamericana, B.A.), Sweden, and Finland.

Reviews:

Adams, Phoebe, *Atlantic*, 206 (July, 1960), pp. 97-98.

*Baro, Gene, *NYHTBR*, June 5, 1960, pp. 1, 12. A novel of "imagination on the grand scale," but one "regrets the failures the more because there is so much merit here."

*Breit, Harvey, *Partisan Review*, 28 (Summer, 1960), pp. 561-563. The novel represents "an immeasurable gain in maturity over the author's fine first novel." Although the narrator lacks significance, the other characters are "astonishingly good" and the work itself is "first-rate."

Dahm, Joseph G., *America*, 103 (June 18, 1960), pp. 380, 381.

*Fenton, Charles A., *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 59 (Fall, 1960). This long essay was not available to this bibliographer.

Gentry, Curt, *San Francisco Sunday Chronicle*, June 5, 1960, p. 13.

Harper's, 221 (July, 1960), p. 93. "Styron's great resource is excess" but "somehow he makes it all work for him. . . . An impressive book."

*Hicks, Granville, *SRL*, 43 (June 4, 1960), p. 4. Most enthusiastic of the early reviews. Says novel is "rich and deep" "and carefully wrought"; that it makes clear Styron is "one of our important writers."

Hutchens, John K., *NYHT*, June 3, 1960, p. 11.

*Malcolm, Donald, *The New Yorker*, 36 (June 4, 1960), pp. 152, 153, 154. Novel stimulates "the reader's curiosity without ever really arousing his interest" and fails because the characters seem not worth caring about.

*Mizener, Arthur, *NYTBR*, June 5, 1960, pp. 5, 26. A careful evaluation that is largely unfavorable.

Newsweek, June 6, 1960, p. 117.

Prescott, Orville, *NYT*, June 3, 1960, p. 29.

Rothberg, Abraham, *New Leader*, July 4-11, 1960, pp. 25-27. Sees Styron, with Ellison and Mailer, as head and shoulder above other writers who emerged after WW II. Though this new novel, an attempt at a masterpiece, exhibits the same faults as the work of Ellison and of Mailer—"self-pity, sentimentality, rhetoric and melodrama"—it "is a magnificent book."—A balanced appraisal.

Time, 75 (June 6, 1960), p. 98. A dismissal of the novel as "a 507-pp. crying jag" and Styron as "an unevenly talented member" of the Southern school of writers.

II. SHORT STORIES

"Autumn." In *One and Twenty: Duke Narrative and Verse, 1924-1945*, W. M. Blackburn, ed. (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1945), pp. 36-53.

"The Enormous Window." In *American Vanguard, 1950*, Charles I. Glicksberg, ed. (New York: New School for Social Research, 1950).

"Long Dark Road." In *One and Twenty: Duke Narrative and Verse, 1924-1945*, pp. 266-280.

"[The] Long March." In *discovery No. 1*, John W. Aldridge and Vance Bourjaily, eds. (New York: Pocket Books, 1953), pp. 221-283. Published as a Random House Modern Library paperback, 1956.

"The McCabes." In *Paris Review*, No. 22 (Autumn-Winter, 1960), pp. 12-28. Part of Chapter VI of *Set This House on Fire*, pp. 298-312.

"A Moment in Trieste." In *American Vanguard, 1948*, Don M. Wolfe, ed. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1948), pp. 241-247. (Published under the name "William C. Styron, Jr.")

III. ARTICLES

- "The Art of Fiction V" [Interview with Styron, by Peter Matthiessen and George Plimpton], *Paris Review*, No. 5 (Spring, 1954), pp. 42-57. Reprinted in *Writers at Work/The Paris Review Interviews*, edit., and with an introduction, by Malcolm Cowley (New York: Viking Press, 1958), pp. 268-282.
- "If You Write for Television . . .," *New Republic*, 140, (April 6, 1959), p. 16. Communication concerning television's handling (or mishandling) of *The Long March*.
- Introduction. *Best Short Stories from The Paris Review*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1959. Pp. 9-16.
- "Letter to an Editor," *Paris Review*, No. 1 (Spring, 1953), pp. 9-13. Styron, speaking for the editors, says the new magazine hopes to break out of the age of criticism and "strive to give dominant space to the fiction and poetry of both established and new writers," beating no drum and grinding no axe, but publishing good writers.
- "The Paris Review," *Harper's Bazaar*, 87 (August, 1953), pp. 122, 173. Styron discusses the founding of the new review, the magazine's purpose, and the magazine's editors (picture of the latter on p. 123).
- "The Prevalence of Wonders," *Nation*, 176 (May 2, 1953), pp. 370-371. A writer's credo, written from Rome.

IV. BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS

- Cowley, Malcolm, ed., *Writers at Work / The Paris Review Interviews* (New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 267.
- Hazard, E. P., "Eight Fiction Finds," *SRL*, 35 (February 16, 1952), p. 17. Report on young writers: Styron is reported as saying he sees no cause to rush into another novel.
- NYHT*, September 9, 1951, p. 2 (portrait, p. 3).
- SRL*, 34 (September 5, 1951), p. 12.
- SRL*, 43 (June 4, 1960), cover portrait.

V. CRITICISM OF STYRON'S WORKS

See starred reviews.

- Aldridge, John W. "The Society of Three Novels." Chapter V of *In Search of Hersey* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1956), pp. 126-148. Pp. 139-141, 146-148 on *Lie Down in Darkness*.
- Geismar, Maxwell, "The Post-War Generation in Arts & Letters," *SRL*, 36 (March 14, 1953), pp. 11-12, 60. Reference to Styron on p. 12.
- "William Styron: The End of Innocence." In *American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1958), pp. 239-250. A highly sympathetic analysis of Styron's work, which finds *Lie Down in Darkness*

"among the three or four best works of the decade," and, in fact, "the key psychological work of the period"; and *The Long March* a "reassuring sign" of Styron's ability to continue writing well.

Lichtenstein, G., "The Exiles," *New Statesman and Nation*, September 6, 1958, pp. 320, 322. References to Styron's relations with *Paris Review*, in course of an account of American writers abroad after World War II.

Stevenson, David L., "Fiction's Unfamiliar Face," *Nation*, 187 (November 1, 1958), pp. 307-309. Compares older novelists (Cather, Lewis, Dreiser, Hemingway), who wrote a novel with a "solid structure, a tight synthesis of its materials, a completed comment on a segment of time in the lives of its characters," with the new craftsmen (Bellow, Styron, Herbert Gold, George Elliott, Norman Mailer), whose novels reflect by their formlessness "a disquieting world where the nature of human value itself is at stake." These novelists "test experience" to find the possibility of happiness or its substitute.

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